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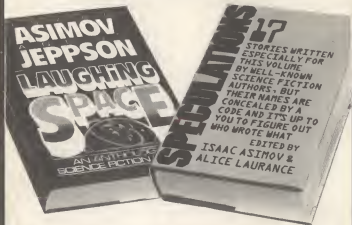
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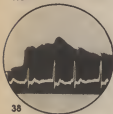
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UP FRONT

Kathleen Moloney

During the short time I've been with *IAsfm*—Dr. Asimov announced my arrival a couple of issues ago—I've paid special attention to the letters that you've sent over the last year or so. How better for the new editor of a magazine to learn what readers like and don't like? I asked myself. And learn I did. According to you, there's too much fantasy in the magazine and not enough, too much humor and not enough, too much hard science and not enough, too much poetry and not enough; Martin Gardner's puzzles are too hard and too easy; and we publish too many "famous names" and too many "unknowns." The only thing that everyone seems to agree about is that Isaac Asimov's editorials are terrific, but he doesn't give *IAsfm* readers enough of his own stories.

In short, I learned that *IAsfm* readers know what they like, and fortunately it's the same thing that I and the other editors here like: good writing, good storytelling, and—most of all—variety. In this issue and in those to come you will see

stories and articles that cover a broad spectrum: serious stories and some with a light touch, hard science fiction and fantasy, stories by established authors and those on their way to becoming established.

You will also see, starting in this issue, some new features, most notably the Profile. We'll be using that space each month to give writers, scientists, critics, and others whose opinions matter to those of us who care about SF a chance to have their say. This month Alvin Toffler, author of *Future Shock* and *The Third Wave*, has some good news and some bad news about the next twenty years.

This month, too, we're introducing a sort-of cartoon by Gerry Mooney. Gerry is a longtime SF fan who has worked for a number of years as an advertising artist. These two interests combine, indescribably, in "Mooney's Module," fueled by Gerry's singular sense of humor.

Finally, this month's issue contains the one thing that everyone has been writing

(Continued on page 37)

EDITORIAL

REVISIONS



by Isaac Asimov

When it comes to writing, I am a "primitive." I had had no instruction when I began to write, or even by the time I had begun to publish. I took no courses. I read no books on the subject.

This was not bravado on my part, or any sense of arrogance. I just didn't know that there *were* courses or books on the subject. In all innocence, I just thought you sat down and wrote. Naturally, I have picked up a great deal about writing in the days since I began; but in certain important respects, my early habits imprinted me and I find I can't change.

Some of these imprinted habits are trivial. For instance, I cannot leave a decent margin. Editors have tried begging and they have tried ordering, and my only response is a firm "Never!"

When I was a kid, you see, getting typewriting paper was a hard thing to do for it required m-o-n-e-y, of which I had none. Therefore what I had, I saved—single space, both sides, and typing to the very edge of

the page; all four edges. Well, I learned that one could not submit a manuscript unless it was double-spaced on one side of the page only; and I was *forced*, unwillingly, to adopt that wasteful procedure. I also learned about margins and established them—but not wide enough. Nor could I ever make them wide enough. My sense of economy had gone as far as it would go and it would go no farther.

More important was the fact that I had never learned about revisions. My routine was (and still is) to write a story in first draft as fast as I can. Then I go over it, and correct errors in spelling, grammar, and word order. Then I prepare my second draft, making minor changes as I go and as they occur to me. My second draft is my final draft. No more changes except under direct editorial order and then with rebellion in my heart.

I didn't know there was any thing wrong with this. I thought it was the way you were *supposed* to write. In fact,

when Bob Heinlein and I were working together at the Navy Yard in Philadelphia during World War II, Bob asked me how I went about writing a story and I told him. He said, "You type it *twice*? Why don't you type it correctly the first time?"

I felt bitterly ashamed; and the very next story I wrote, I tried my level best to get it right the first time. I failed. No matter how carefully I wrote, there were always things that had to be changed. I decided I just wasn't as good as Heinlein.

But then, in 1950, I attended the Breadloaf Writers' Conference at the invitation of Fletcher Pratt. There I listened in astonishment to some of the things said by the lecturers. "The secret of writing," said one of them, "is rewriting."

Fletcher Pratt himself said, "If you ever write a paragraph that seems to you to *sing*, to be the best thing you've ever written, to be full of wonder and poetry and greatness—cross it out, it stinks!"

Over and over again, we were told about the importance of polishing, of revising, of tearing up and rewriting. I got the bewildered notion that, far from being expected to type it right the first time, as Heinlein had advised me, I was expected to type it all wrong, and get it right only by the 32nd time, if at all.

I went home immersed in gloom; and the very next time I wrote a story, I tried to tear it up. I couldn't make myself do it. So I went over it to see all the terrible things I had done, in order to revise them. To my chagrin, everything sounded great to me. (My own writing always sounds great to me.) Eventually, after wasting hours and hours—to say nothing of spiritual agony—I gave it up. My stories would have to be written the way they always were—and still are.

What is it I am saying, then? That it is wrong to revise? No, of course not—any more than it is wrong not to revise.

You don't do *anything* automatically, simply because some "authority" (including me) says you should. Each writer is an individual, with his or her own way of thinking, and doing, and writing. Some writers are not happy unless they polish and polish, unless they try a paragraph this way and that way and the other way.

Once Oscar Wilde, coming down to lunch, was asked how he had spent his morning. "I was hard at work," he said.

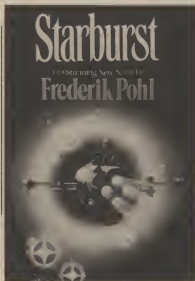
"Oh?" he was asked. "Did you accomplish much?"

"Yes, indeed," said Wilde. "I inserted a comma."

At dinner, he was asked how he had spent the afternoon. "More work," he said.

"Inserted another comma?"

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was the rather sardonic question.

"No," said Wilde, unperturbed. "I removed the one I had inserted in the morning."

Well, if you're Oscar Wilde, or some other great stylist, polishing may succeed in imparting an ever-higher gloss to your writing and you *should* revise and revise. If, on the other hand, you're not much of a stylist (like me, for instance) and are only interested in straightforward story-telling and clarity, then a small amount of revision is probably all you need. Beyond that small amount you may merely be shaking up the rubble.

I was told last night, for instance, that Daniel Keyes (author of the classic "Flowers for Algernon") is supposed to have said, "The author's best friend is the person who shoots him just before he makes one change too many."

Let's try the other extreme. William Shakespeare is reported by Ben Jonson to have boasted that he "never blotted a word." The Bard of Avon, in other words, would have us believe that, like Heinlein, he got it right the first time, and that what he handed in to the producers at the Globe Theatre was first draft. (He may have been twisting the truth a bit. Prolific writers tend to exaggerate the amount of non-revision they do.)

Well, if you happen to be another Will Shakespeare, or another Bob Heinlein,* maybe you can get away without revising at all. But if you're just an ordinary writer (like me) maybe you'd better do *some*. (As a matter of fact, Ben Jonson commented that he wished Will had "blotted out a thousand," and there are indeed places where Will might have been—ssh!—improved on.)

Let's pass on to a slightly different topic.

I am sometimes asked if I prepare an outline first before writing a story or a book.

The answer is: No, I don't.

To begin with, this was another one of those cases of initial ignorance. I didn't know at the start of my career that such things as outlines existed. I just wrote a story and stopped when I finished, and if it happened to be one length it was a short, and if it happened to be another it was a novelette.

When I wrote my first novel, Doubleday told me to make it 70,000 words long. So I wrote until I had 70,000 words and then stopped—and by the greatest good luck, it turned out to be the end of the novel.

When I began my second novel, I realized that such an amazing coincidence was not

*Mr. Heinlein now admits to two or three drafts on his longer works.
—Ed.

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likely to happen twice in a row, so I prepared an outline. I quickly discovered two things. One, an outline constricted me so that I could not breathe. Two, there was no way I could force my characters to adhere to the outline; even if I wanted to do so, they refused. I never tried

an outline again. In even my most complicated novels, I merely fix the ending firmly in my mind; decide on a beginning; and then, from that beginning, charge toward the ending, making up the details as I go along.

On the other hand, P. G.

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Wodehouse, for whose writings I have an idolatrous admiration, always prepared outlines, spending more time on them than on the book and getting every event, however small, firmly in place before beginning.

There's something to be said on both sides, of course.

If you are a structured and rigid person who likes everything under control, you will be uneasy without an outline. On the other hand, if you are an undisciplined person with a tendency to wander all over the landscape, you will be better off with an outline even if you feel you wouldn't like one.

On the third hand, if you are quick-thinking and ingenious, but with a strong sense of the whole, you will be better off without an outline.

How do you decide which you are? Well, try an outline, or try writing without one, and find out for yourself.

The thing is: Don't feel that any rule of writing must be hard and fast, and handed down from Sinai. Try them all out by all means; but, in the last analysis, stick to that which makes you comfortable. You are, after all, an individual. ●



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by Baird Searles

Special Deliverance

By Clifford Simak,
Del Rey, \$12.50.

□ On the whole this is a good time to be an SF reader. Part of the reason is that science fiction has reached a point of amazing variety and vitality, yet many of the creative personalities who formed it are still around and writing.

One such creative personality is Clifford Simak. I can remember the days when all that was needed to make an SF reader blissfully happy was for *Astounding* (now *Analog*) to publish another Asimov "Foundation" story or another Simak "City" story. The latter, of course, was one of the components that eventually became the book *City*, on which Simak's reputation firmly rests. It is wonderful to me that in 1982, 40 years later, we have a new novel by Simak, the most recent in a long line of good stories that have kept readers happy and coming back for more.

It's unlikely, however, that *Special Deliverance* will go down in history as a major work. In

it we meet that old friend, the mysterious machine, in this case disguised as a slot machine lurking in a storeroom. The machine transports the hero, a rather dreary professorial type named Edward Lansing, to another world. There he finds a rustic inn where he meets five other beings—four humans, one robot—from yet other worlds, seemingly alternate Earths of great variety. Getting little information from the innkeeper but deciding that they have been brought together in this place for some purpose, they set off down the road.

On their journey they encounter a building-sized blue cube of unknown material, an abandoned city, and a singing tower, at which they turn right and run into Chaos (literally). Nowhere do they find any concrete information as to where they are and why; what few people they run into are also imported and as baffled as Lansing's group, which becomes riddled (pun intended) with internal dissension and begins to be eliminated one by one.

Eventually, the riddles are solved (rather unfairly, I think, since the answers were there all along, but we weren't given any clue to the fact that they *were* answers); the solution/ *dénouement* happens so near the end of the book, one wonders if all the aimless wandering around that makes up the rest of the story is worth it. Simak seems to have gotten to a point in his storytelling in which almost everything extraneous to the ongoing action is eliminated; this gives *Special Deliverance* something of the quality of an allegorical quest. The characters, for instance, just go wandering without wondering; they further Simak's plot but do not emerge as real.

Nevertheless, curiosity keeps one reading, things never really bog down, and the final solution is intriguing.

Star Colony

By Keith Laumer,
St. Martin's, \$15.95.

This novel purports to be Volume 1 of an official history of Earth's first colony in three volumes, and is consequently given lots of *verismo* front matter: an introduction, a prefatory note, a special note, a reader's foreword, acknowledgments, and a

final prefatory note. All of them cite sources alluding to the current situation on Colmar, the colony world, and Earth and make references to myths and mythical heroes who played a part in the history of the colony. None of this pretentious opening material helps the downright silly story to come.

It begins with the crash landing of the interstellar colonizing vessel on the new world. The potential colonists are a crowd I wouldn't send out to settle the vacant lot next door. For instance, they seem to have devoted no thought whatsoever to what they'll do once they get off the ship. A first encounter with the natives, elephantine oysters with a hive mind and the capability of manufacturing *anything* the way our oysters turn out pearls, is equally ineptly handled.

We then jump several hundred years ahead and to Earth, which is overcrowded and oppressive; five malcontents steal a ship and set out to find the "lost" colony, knowledge of which has been suppressed. When they land, they find a culture (for lack of a better word) that is fragmented and combative, and for several hundred pages they bounce

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"Could it be . . .?"

around the landscape, being shot at, ambushed, and laid siege to, trying to find someone sensible to talk to. By this time, the book was making very little sense, and finishing it was a painful experience I don't recommend to anyone. Characters disappear, people come and go with no explanation or motivation, and the dialogue is excruciating. All the ship's officers, for instance, talk like Howard Hunter, the SWAT captain on "Hill Street Blues," while the low-life colonists come out with lines like, "I'll have that sucker Slammer over here before you two big-domes have got a speech ready to give him," which would have been dated in a third-rate 1940s detective novel.

The end of *Star Colony* is as messy as the rest of it, so I'm not sure whether the implied next two volumes are really to come or not. I have the awful feeling they are.

The Coming of the Demons

By Gwyneth Hood,

William Morrow & Co., \$12.95.

This one's a rare bird indeed, being essentially a historical science fiction novel. To bring this kind of novel off, the author must not only be competent science-fictionally, but must have

historical expertise as well. What's more, *The Coming of the Demons* handles a large-scale event. This is hardly unusual for the field of SF, but it presents problems when the story is set in a well-recorded period of history.

As far as I know, from a middling-fair knowledge of post-Roman Europe, humanoid aliens did *not* suddenly appear smack-dab in the middle of the complicated hostilities between the Hohenstaufen dynasty and the Pope (Manfred and all that); and said aliens did *not* prevent, more or less accidentally, the execution of Conradin and therefore the end of the Holy Roman Empire.

That's what Hood gives us, though, presumably in an alternate continuum, and with mixed results. Pre-Renaissance Italy is not the simplest of milieus; the aliens, from an advanced culture and traveling many generations in an ecologically balanced world-ship, are also a complex lot. It took me about 200 pages to sort everyone out, to establish who was on what side in the various conflicts going on in each civilization, and particularly to work out the tenets and *modus operandi* of the aliens.

While the author is strong in depicting the human-historical side of her story, she seems less sure in creating an alien society. In fact, she violates some of the established rules of SF in her extraterrestrials. The nomenclature, for instance, is mostly created, but there are also Terran references, as in the name of the villain, Jimmik Centauri, and the heroine, Natheless, who comments at one point that her name means "Nevertheless." These are nits for picking, perhaps, but they're jarring to the reader used to the totally consistent alien cultures of, say, C. J. Cherryh. More importantly, a major plot development hinges on interfertility between human and alien (as you can see, the two get involved other than culturally), a very questionable device without a strong rationale.

The reader who can overlook these matters and stick with the novel until its complexities become clear will get a story based on an intriguing and unusual concept, developed with much detail and, for the most part, intelligence. Its ending leaves plenty of room for a sequel; I am interested enough in what has happened to be curious about what *will* happen.

A Gift of Mirrovax

By Malcolm MacCloud,
Atheneum, \$9.95.

As regular readers know, I like to dig around and come up with things that might not be talked about elsewhere. One of my digging places is that curious other world called juvenile books, where a good deal of SF is published that seldom, it seems, goes anywhere but to libraries. This time the spade-work has turned up a miss and a near-hit; *A Gift of Mirrorvax* is the miss.

It starts out with promise: Vax is a world that is run by three corporations that are competing bitterly for the skilled labor force. Michael is a relatively unskilled youth for whom the computer of Transvax, the transportation corporation, suddenly offers a huge sum. It seems that Transvax is about to journey into space for the first time, and Michael is the only person on the planet who can fill one of three positions on the flight.

After training, *ex* Vax they go, bound for that planet's twin, newly discovered because it is always on the opposite side of their sun. (It was about here I began to feel tremors of apprehension.) When they land on

Mirrorvax, as the new planet is cleverly named, they discover it to be a pastoral world of peace and love, and Michael spends the rest of the book figuring out that he is the emissary of a naughty, totalitarian culture that will ruin this nice (boring) place. There's also a strong religious bent to the book, which I probably shouldn't even bring up, since it opens a whole can of worms; in brief, science fiction and faith are a difficult mix, at which only C. S. Lewis has ever been successful.

In the dedication, the author refers to *A Gift of Mirrorvax* as a fable, but it has the trappings of SF. I can only hope that the science fictional fable does not become a trend.

The Keeper of the Isis Light

By Monica Hughes,
Atheneum, \$8.95.

The Keeper of the Isis Light is also a juvenile by an author unknown in SF, and it comes across a good deal better than the preceding.

Olwen Pendennis has been essentially alone on the planet Isis for most of her sixteen years, her parents having been killed in a severe storm when she was very young. They had been sent to Isis as the keepers

of the Isis light, a long-term monitor that beams information about Isis, a potential colony, to Earth.

A shipload of colonists arrives, but Olwen's life on Isis, despite the social and intellectual education given her by her guardian robot, has changed her (to be specific as to how would blunt a neat internal twist), and the inevitable conflict develops.

The novel is didactic in the way so many books written for adolescents are, and this will probably be the main drawback for an adult reader (or an adolescent, for that matter). But it is not overwhelmingly so, its scientific and fictional concepts are solid, and I enjoyed it. There are good things to be found in the *terra incognita* of youth-oriented publishing.

The Hand of Zei

By L. Sprague de Camp,
Owlswick Press, \$20.50.

Well, hello, Zei! It's so nice to have you back where you belong (in print).

This wonderful romp (a serial from the pages of *Astounding* circa 1950) has been unavailable for far too long. Zei is the princess of a matriarchal state on the planet Krishna. With

her hand (in marriage) go certain problems for the groom, such as ritual sacrifice after a year and service as a main dish for a royal banquet.

Falling for Zei is only one of the problems faced by Earthman Dick Barevelt on Krishna; he's a milquetoast on what seems to be a suicidal mission (which he's taken on to escape his nagging mother). This mission consists of finding his employer, an explorer type last seen heading for the Krishnan Sunqar, a vast, floating swamp, chock full of strange and vicious beasts, pirates, and drug-smugglers. The floating vine that makes up the Sunqar also goes to make a pernicious drug that enables the females of Zei's country to dominate the males, and there's a terrible plot afoot to try the same thing on Earth. (De Camp demonstrates that a matriarchy can be just as horrendous as a patriarchy; he came down square on the side of equality long before it was fashionable.)

However, the story isn't the only good thing about this new edition. It also contains the 22 illustrations that appeared with it in its magazine publication; they are by Edd Cartier, one of the three really great artists

who worked in the SF pulps. His style is less subtle, more cartoon-like than the other two (Virgil Finlay and Hannes Bok); this might have been limiting, but anyone who knows his sleek and beautiful spaceships and machines, his charming and inventive robots and extraterrestrials, and his extraordinarily handsome people of both sexes can safely say it isn't so. The cover painting will be a treat for even those who date far enough back to be familiar with the interiors. It's not one of the magazine covers that Cartier did for the novel but a painting by Kelly Freas, the popular modern illustrator, based on a color sketch by Cartier and combining their talents.

You notice I said *cover* painting, not dust-jacket painting, though the book is a hard cover. There is yet another aspect of this special edition that I'm particularly taken with, because it gives me the excuse to sound off about something I've wanted to go into for some time. The handsome cover painting for *Zei* is printed onto its front cover, as is the drawing on the back. In other words, there's *no dust jacket*.

As one concerned with books and the supposedly forward-

analog

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looking field of science fiction, I have long been bothered that a book is one of the most backward and ill-designed objects available on a large scale, somewhere on a par with the wooden washboard. And symptomatic of this is the dust jacket. I hate it as a bookseller, because one careless customer can render a book unsalable by ripping the jacket; as a reader, since it does nothing but get in the way and is useful only for marking my place, which stretches it out of shape; and as a collector, because it is the first part of a book to start getting shabby and the most difficult to preserve.

And this is the thing we have to contend with in a period rife with materials that are handsome, easily kept clean, virtually indestructible, and which can be printed on. (Publishers' main argument for the dj is that it provides space for informational material about the book, such as price and what it's about; surely ingenuity could solve that problem.) Readers of the world, unite! Down with dust jackets!

SHE

By H. Rider Haggard

Dragon's Dream, \$14.95 (paper)
\$24.95 (cloth)

The Drowned World

By J.G. Ballard

Dragon's Dream, \$14.95 (paper)
\$24.95 (cloth)

Two more spectacular reprint editions that deserve mention are the old classic *She* and the recent classic *The Drowned World*. If there's anyone at all around who hasn't read *She*, be assured that it is still eminently readable and that it's still the epitome of the 19th-century novel of "off to the unknown corners of the globe to find wonders." In this case the wonder is a two-millennia-old lady of ravishing beauty, great wit, and an eccentric love life who dwells in the ruins of a vast lost civilization. The new illustrations in black-and-white and color by Mike Embden and Tom

Gill, are as wonder-full as the story, especially a long view of the mountain that hides the lost valley of Kôr, and a closer view of its great walls.

The title of *The Drowned World* says it all: the ice caps have melted, and the Earth is a steaming, crawling, oozing mess, with mosquitos the size of hummingbirds, iguanas the size of cows, and only 5 million people left. First published in 1963, this is one of the most intelligent of the after-disaster novels to see print. The paintings for this new edition are not only beautiful; they're also extraordinarily right, and *not* just because they're water colors. The artist is Dick French. ●

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MARTIN GARDNER

HOME SWEET HOME

Silently, swiftly, invisibly, an alien intelligence from hyperspace floated through the streets of Los Angeles, gathering information on the region's life forms. Here is an excerpt, translated into English, from a monumental report that the alien later submitted to its superior:

We observed a young lady, riding a bus, who held on her lap a small object shaped like a rectangular parallelepiped. The lengths of the object's edges were in the rough proportions of 1 to 14 to 20. The object consisted entirely of thin laminations made from dried plants, each lamination covered with complex chemical patterns. One face of the object had stamped upon it a replica of a life form we have not yet observed anywhere on the planet. At the lower left corner of the same face, a rectangle contained 37 horizontal black lines of varying thicknesses. At the top of the face were six large symbols that apparently form a Russian word we have not yet deciphered.

What object is the alien describing? If you can't figure it out, turn to page 37 for the answer.





Gravity.
It isn't just a good idea.
It's the law.



PROFILE

ALVIN TOFFLER

by Charles Platt †

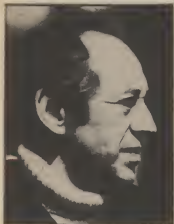
Predicting the future used to be a disreputable occupation. Aside from astrologers and psychics, science fiction writers were about the only people who took it seriously; and their few conscientious efforts (scattered among the lurid pulp adventure) received little attention. During the 1930s, 1940s, and even most of the 1950s, stories of spaceflight, cybernetics, atomic weapons, and overpopulation simply seemed too far-fetched for most people to bother with.

Times, of course, have

changed. From Herman Kahn onward we have seen a succession of respected academics devoting their whole careers to projecting the future. As science has made a more tangible impact on society, a public appetite has grown for popularized predictions. And to satisfy this appetite, we have mass-marketed writers such as Alvin Toffler.

Toffler's best-known books, *Future Shock* and *The Third Wave*, operate in much the same way as good, serious science fiction: they

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“I like the idea of a human thrust into space, but I think there is a kind of blind wish on the part of the most enthusiastic space advocates that all of our present social and political problems would somehow go away.”

extrapolate current trends in technology and predict the social consequences. In this sense Toffler is just as much a seer or a dream maker as Arthur C. Clarke or Frederik Pohl.

Alvin Toffler willingly acknowledges the parallel, and the role that science fiction can play: “Science fiction is a very valuable tool for creating future consciousness, for allowing young people to entertain alternative images of reality,” he says. “I view science fiction as a treasury of models—models of alternative political and social systems, sexual relationships, forms of technology, and so on. The more alternative models of which we are aware, the more flexible our responses can be to present-day situations.

“I have read a fair amount of it. I like John Brunner; I like Bob Sheckley. There are many, from time to time, whom I’ve enjoyed. I read *Man Plus*, by Frederik Pohl; I thought that was a very fine book.”

I talked to Toffler in his

apartment on the Upper East Side of Manhattan. It's a wide, sprawling, sparsely furnished expanse of white walls and uniform gray carpeting. The decor is restrained almost to the point of austerity: generous in scale but modest in pretensions. Custom-made, built-in bookshelves are neatly, fully stocked with row upon row of volumes on politics, sociology, and the future. There are built-in leather-covered couches and modern marble-topped tables. There are few ornaments; no clutter; and nothing, anywhere, out of place.

In his books Toffler comes across with pulpit-thumping fervor, a Falwell of futurology pointing to the One True Way of socio-technological fulfillment. He's been criticized for his brash, breezy style, which summarizes social subtleties in jargonized prose reminiscent of marriage manuals and diet guides. "Blip Reading," scoffed the *New York Times*, which went on to ridicule Toffler's "titillating but slipshod analysis."

In person Alvin Toffler seems quite different; in no way is he a wide-eyed prophet preaching some simplistic gospel of high-tech. A middle-aged, slightly balding, amiable man dressed conservatively in gray suit, white shirt, and dark tie, he speaks quietly, patiently, making frequent thoughtful references. He reminds me, in fact, of a psychiatrist, with the world as his patient: he gently examines its condition and offers his diagnosis in a manner that is neutral and detached, yet full of compassion—he clearly cares about his themes. He seems, in fact, sincerely worried about the future.

"Things are going to be *much* worse," he says, when I ask about the next ten or twenty years—a period that *The Third Wave* tends to dismiss as "transitional" along the way to an eventual utopia. "I think there is a good likelihood of severe economic conflict," he goes on. "In the United States we're going through a precarious and almost sinister lull in the political mood, but I don't

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think that the present administration is going to continue to be unopposed. And the forms of opposition and conflict are liable to be quite different from those of the past.

"We're not going to go through a classical depression or classical inflation. What we're seeing is the emergence of a differentiated society. While some people are eating dogfood, there's money to burn in other communities—the sharp contrast between a Second-Wave community like Youngstown or Detroit and embryonic Third-Wave communities like Dallas, Houston, or Silicon Valley makes this plain. We no longer have a uniform national economy, and the problems can't be addressed using the blunderbuss tools that were developed for uniform systems. So I look forward to a great deal of economic difficulty, of a new kind."

He is alluding, here, to his belief that a split is developing between "Second Wave" communities (wedded to big government, heavy

industry, and traditional values) and communities evolving toward his "Third Wave" vision, of loose-knit, diverse, untraditional citizens whose allegiance is more to various special-interest minority groups than to the nation as a whole, and who are starting to use technology for their own individualistic ends instead of remaining passive consumers dependent on the products of large corporations. It's almost a Libertarian vision, and it's based on great faith in the potential of the individual, whom Toffler seems to trust far more than he trusts our contemporary organizations and institutions:

"The peculiar position we find ourselves in today challenges the old political assumptions that have been made by radicals of both Right and Left, that an elite is running things for its own advantage against our best interests. That presupposes that the decisions being made by an elite actually bring about the results anticipated. A far greater danger to us lies not in the anticipated

consequences of policies taken by elites but in the unanticipated consequences. In a time when an elite understands its society and knows how to play the game to its own advantage, then it makes sense to say 'they' are doing us in deliberately for their own self-interest. Now the best you can say is they may do us in by mistake. Because they don't understand the system that they're allegedly managing.

"Some of our best-known leaders in business and industry are actually very intelligent people, but they make very unintelligent decisions. I think the explanation of this paradox lies in the decision-making institutions. I believe that our institutions are stupid, because they're obsolete, and you could put teams of geniuses to work in those institutions and the results would still be stupid."

Future Shock was a study of damaging side-effects of technology and a plea for the humanizing of progress. As Toffler's comments indicate here, his ideas in *The Third*

Wave go much further. He is now concerned not so much with improving our ability to live with change as with regearing the whole system. *The Third Wave* even proposes a new Constitution, enabling direct democratic representation of the electorate by means of votes cast via personal home-computer terminals.

I comment that, regardless of whether his vision is desirable, it sounds implausible, since it entails the dismantling of very large organizations that currently wield a great deal of power. His response, however, is that the process has already begun.

"Industries that seem extremely powerful today are going to die, no matter how the managers of those industries try to hang onto their seats of power. I have actually had an oil company president say to me, 'We're finished. We're going to be as dead as the railroads. We're going to be replaced by solar photovoltaics, by hydrogen, by a thousand new ways of producing energy.' So that's one member of the elite who

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isn't going to wait around for change to overtake him.

"Systems do change, and institutions do collapse and die, and new ones spring up. One way that this happens is by internal restructuring—in a *coup d'état*, the young turks take over from the old turks. Usually this is in response to great external pressures on the system. Another possibility is that outsiders simply topple the institution and create a new one. But the most common way in which changes occur is when the old institution stays in place, and we continue to pay lip-service to it, while at the same time new institutions spring up almost unnoticed and take on the real business of society. Pretty soon what you have is the shell or husk of the old institution still intact—a monarchy is a good example—while the real decisions and activities take place somewhere else.

"I think we're going to see something like that happen in many areas. Take education: the factory-like school in my view was a Second Wave phenomenon. We may not

wipe out the school, but more and more kids are going to be educated at home, on the job, in summer camps, in computer stores on Main Street, and in a dozen other places. The school may continue to crank out a routinized education, but that's not where things will actually happen."

I comment that one place where his ideas for a Third Wave society could be brought to life without the need for displacing an existing system would be in a space colony. Does he believe this will ever be possible?

"I hope so. I like the idea of our adventure in space. However, most of our images of cultures in space are highly unimaginative derivatives of terrestrial cultures. For example, the movie *Outland* pictured a mining operation on one of Jupiter's moons, but the social structure was a classical industrial-style society and culture, and I think the notion that you can take a Second Wave industrial form of management and transfer that into space at a time in the future is simply

inane. I think we're going to invent new forms of management and industrial relations, and it's not just going to be the 1890s or 1930s factory reproduced in outer space.

"The second thing to be said about space colonies is that I fear they represent a form of escapism. I like the idea of a human thrust into space, but I think there is a kind of blind wish on the part of the most enthusiastic space advocates that all of our present social and political problems would somehow go away; that if we could make that fresh start out there, it wouldn't matter that millions of people are starving to death on Earth or that people are killing themselves or that riots are bloodying the streets."

Despite Toffler's obviously comfortable lifestyle, he often refers to everyday problems and hardships in a manner that implies first-hand experience. When I ask him about his background, I discover that although he always knew he wanted to be a writer, he spent a lot of time doing manual labor.

"I went to New York University at the very end of World War II. I met my wife in as clichéd a fashion as possible, on a park bench in Washington Square. As soon as I finished at the university we decided to leave New York and go to the Midwest to work in factories. At that time I couldn't get a job writing, anyway, and we wanted to get away from the sheltered middle-class environment in which I'd grown up. And I wanted to help organize unions. For more than five years I worked as a millwright in a steel foundry, as a punch-press operator, on an auto assembly line. I used a jackhammer to break concrete. I drove a truck. I became a welder. . . . My wife worked in a steel foundry, a lightbulb factory, and she became a shop steward.

"Drawing on my experience, I went to work for a trade-union newspaper, my first job as a journalist, covering strikes and political meetings. From there I went to Washington as a correspondent for a small Pennsylvania newspaper, and

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then I began writing for popular magazines."

Toffler has been self-employed ever since, with the exception of a two-year stint as managing editor of *Fortune* magazine. He has taught at The New School in New York ("It may have been the first course on the future, in 1965"), has lectured widely, and has done other academic work. He has also served as a consultant to various organizations, most notably AT&T, for whom he spent two years writing a report. The report was initially suppressed because of its unpopular recommendations, but it has recently been exhumed by management and may have been influential in recent reorganization. Of this experience, Toffler remarks, "I'm proud of the fact that they did not initially get what they wanted. My income has never depended on selling contract services. Unlike a think-tank, which operates from corporate consulting fees, I'm an institutionally unaffiliated individual. I can say what I want."

I ask him if he has plans to

implement the changes he describes theoretically in his books. His answer is emphatically negative:

"I have long ago assessed my own strengths and weaknesses and found that I am not an organizer. I don't get any creative satisfaction out of administrative or organizational activity, and I'm not very good at it. My role is to communicate, to encourage, to help in any way I can, short of taking a direct organizing role. I do not see myself as a guru or as the leader of a mass movement. Not only would my own happiness be impaired, but I think whatever value I have as a creative contributor to this process would be diminished.

"I don't believe that everything I've written in *Future Shock* or *The Third Wave* will happen, or can happen. I don't believe that the 'solutions' I present to our deepest problems are necessarily workable.

"For instance, I've spent the last ten or fifteen years trying to argue that we need more and better technology, and we

need to be far more highly selective about it, and these decisions can no longer be left to scientific, business, or political elites. The risks and the gains in powerful technologies are too important to be left to those elites. Now, it is easy to say that but very hard to come up with practical procedures for giving people a voice in the selection of tomorrow's technologies. But if you do not give people that voice, you are not giving them a voice in the selection of their own future. If major technological decisions continue to be made in the way they have been made in the past, it's a living hypocrisy, and a dangerous one.

"When I write about this, or about, for example, the introduction of random sampling into the political process, or ways of linking referenda to representation, I don't think somebody's necessarily going to run out and do it. I present these ideas very often because I think they will stimulate other people to invent alternative ways. I want to

open up the reader's mind to other ways of conceptualizing our political and social structures. I think that that helps people adapt; and to have a repertoire of alternatives is necessary.

"Imagination is the resource that's in shortest supply; we'll run out of imagination long before we'll run out of oil, and I think that that's a result of child-parent relationships as well as the entire Second Wave education system, which operates, as I think is now understood by most people, to eliminate imaginative decision-making by children. I place an extremely high value on imagination and on the ability to dream and to visualize new possibilities."

If we look again at Toffler's books with this attitude in mind (ignoring the occasional excesses of his prose, which he himself describes as "passionate"), the text makes much better sense: not as literal-minded prescriptions for immediate action but as a kind of circumscribed science fiction, playing with possibilities to stimulate the imagination. Whether or not

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his division of modern history into "Second Wave" and "Third Wave" is as all-embracing as he would like us to believe, Alvin Toffler has succeeded in synthesizing an original perspective; and he has expressed it in a way that has reached vast numbers of

people who might otherwise not think so much about the promise and potential of the future. At a time when some people seem increasingly apprehensive about scientists and technology, we should be grateful to any writer who can do what he has done. ●

Charles Platt, formerly editor of *New Worlds*, an influential English SF magazine of the late '60s and early '70s, now resides in New York City. He is the author of *Dream Makers* (Berkley, 1980), a volume of profiles of writers of imaginative fiction. The preceding profile will appear in *Dream Makers II*, to be published by Berkley in the spring of 1983.



UP FRONT

(Continued from page 6)

about—a story, never before published, by Isaac Asimov. I am sure that you'll agree it has

been worth waiting for. While I can't promise that there will be an Asimov story in every issue, I do guarantee that you will be seeing them more often.

In the meantime, keep writing letters, and we'll keep paying attention.

MARTIN GARDNER

HOME SWEET HOME

SOLUTION TO HOME SWEET HOME

(from page 24)

The alien is describing an issue of *Isaac Asimov's Science Fiction*

Here is another excerpt from the alien's report:

We observed the following strange event. A tall man tried desperately to reach a seven-faced polyhedron, partly buried in the ground. Two of the solid's faces were irregular pentagons. The other five faces were rectangular.

A shorter man, wearing a mask that covered his entire face, crouched near the polyhedron. He tore off his mask, dropped it to the ground, and apparently tried to prevent the tall man from reaching the polyhedron. Suddenly the tall man threw himself flat on the ground and stretched out one hand. A microsecond after he touched the polyhedron, the shorter man jabbed him in his buttocks with a small sphere, the surface of which had a pattern that resembled the yin-yang symbol of the Orient (see our former report on Tokyo).

A third man, dressed entirely in black, extended his arms and yelled a word we did not understand. Immediately a crowd of shouting men emerged from a half-underground structure, picked up the tall man, and carried him away.

What familiar event is the alien describing? You should be able to guess before turning to page 52.

LAZARUS RISING

by Gregory Benford

art: Broeck Steadman

Dr. Benford, professor of physics
at the University of California, Irvine,
won the Nebula award
for his novel *Timescape*.

He lives with his wife
and children in
Laguna Beach, CA.



When he woke up, he was dead.

Utter blackness, total silence. Nothing.

No smells. There should be the clean, efficient scent of a medical center.

No background rustle of steps. No drone of air conditioning, no distant murmur of conversations, no jangle of a telephone.

He could not feel any press of his own weight. No cold table or starched sheets rubbed his skin.

They had disconnected all his external nerves.

He felt a rush of fear. Loss of senses. To do that required finding the major nerves as they wound up through the spine. Then a medical tech had to splice them out of the tangled knot at the back of the neck. Delicate work. He had heard about it, of course, wondered what it was like—but *this* . . .

Panic ran through him. What did it mean? Why—?

He fought the rising confusion in his mind. He had to explore this, think.

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He pushed the emotions away. First he had to know more. Was he fully dead? He waited, letting the adrenaline of his fear wash away. Concentrate. Think of quietness, stillness . . .

Yes. *There*. He felt a weak, regular thump that might be his heart.

Behind that, as though far away, was a slow, faint fluttering of lungs.

That was all. The body's internal nerves were thinly spread, he knew. They gave only vague, blunt senses. But there was enough to tell him that the basic functions were still plodding on.

There was a dim pressure that might be his bladder. He could pick up nothing specific from legs or arms.

He tried to move his head. Nothing. No feedback.

Open an eye? Only blackness.

Legs—he tried both, hoping that only the sensations were gone. He might be able to detect a leg moving by the change in pressure somewhere in his body.

No response. But if he could sense his bladder, he should have gotten something back from the shifting weight of a leg.

That meant his lower motor control was shut off.

The panic rose in him. It was a cold, blind sensation. Normally this strong an emotion would bring deeper breathing, a heavier heartbeat, flexing muscles, a tingling urgency. He felt none of that. There was only a swirl of conflicting thoughts, a jittery forking in his mind like summer lightning.

He forced himself to think.

His name was Carlos Farenza, and he was 87 years old. Born in 1958. His own father had died at 62, but 87 was no great achievement these days. With enough organ replacements, blood-scrubbing, neuroengineering, and anti-aging treatments, anybody could make it to a hundred. It was just a matter of looking both ways before you stepped out into traffic.

The only limitation was cost. Nearly everybody was on Universal Medical, but society couldn't afford to go on overhauling each eroding body. It was like keeping an old car running until you were spending more money on parts and repairs than a new car would cost.

So there was a test. For Carlos it came every three years, and that's what he was here for. You came in and they pried you open and ran a whole-body diagnostic. If your mental and physio indices were up to par, you got three more years of free service on Universal Medical. Like getting your driver's license renewed.

If you flunked . . . Even then, it didn't necessarily mean death. Not unless you elected for that, of course. There was a hundred thousand kilobuck reward, passed on to whomever you stipulated,

if you checked out; the state had to encourage elective suicides, to keep costs down.

Most people chose the sleepslots. The medical techs put you away in a near-freezing slot, electronically monitored. They stored you until something could be done about your condition. That might take ten years, and it might take a thousand.

So they had laid Carlos out on a diagnostic slab, hooked him up, said the usual soothing words. Everybody was nervous when going through diagnostics. It wasn't a life-or-death thing, precisely. It was merely life versus suspended life.

But he damn well knew which he wanted. He had good friends. His job was a pretty humdrum office position, but he still enjoyed it. Divorced at the moment, but that could change. He had places he wanted to see, relatives, a neighborhood. Plans. He didn't want to wake up in some distant future with outdated skills, a lonely stranger.

If you failed the test, there was no reprieve. The techs would methodically prepare you for the sleepslots. If they had discovered a deteriorating condition, something that might malfunction under the strain of bringing you back to full consciousness . . . well, then the law said they could stick you in the sleepslots without waking you up. Just shut you down.

Like this.

They weren't finished, or else he'd never have come awake again. Some technician had screwed up. Shut off a nerve center somewhere, using pinpoint interruptors, but maybe pinched one filament too many. They worked at the big junction between brain and spinal cord, down at the base of the skull. It was like a big cable back there, and the techs found their way by feedback analysis. It was easy to get the microscopic nerve fibers mixed up. If the tech was working fast, looking forward to coffee break, the guy could reactivate the conscious cerebral functions and not notice it on the scope until later.

He had to do something.

The strange, cold panic seized him again. Adrenaline, left over from some earlier, deep physiological response. He was afraid now, but there was no answering chemical symphony of the body. His gland subsystems were shut down.

An analytical rage built in him. He had never been cut off like this. *If the slots gave you this kind of living death . . .*

There was no way to tell how rapidly time passed. He counted heartbeats, but his pulse rate depended on so many factors—

Okay, then, how long did he have? He knew it took hours to shut down a nervous system, damp the lymphatic zones, leech the blood

of residues. Hours. And the technicians would leave a lot of the job to the automatic machines.

He noticed the chill as a faint background sensation. It seemed to spread as he paid attention to it, filling his body, bringing a pleasant, mild quiet . . . a drifting . . . a slow slide toward sleep . . .

Deep within him, something said *no*.

He willed himself to think in the blackness and the creeping cold. The technicians always left a pathway to the outside, so if something went wrong, the patient could signal. It was a precaution to take care of situations like this.

Eyebrows? He tried them, felt nothing.

Mouth? The same.

He made himself think of the steps necessary to form a word. Constrict the throat. Force air out at a faster rate. Move the tongue and lips.

Nothing. No faint hum echoing in his sinus cavities to tell him that muscles worked, that breath strummed his vocal cords.

He had read about this in a magazine article somewhere. The easiest way was just to shut down a whole section of the body. That must be what they did. Okay. His head was out, legs out. Feet gone, too. And genitals weren't under conscious control even at the best of times.

Arms, then. He tried the left. No answering shift of internal pressures. But how big would the effect be? He might be waving his hand straight up in the air and never know it.

Try the right. Again, no way to tell if . . .

No, wait. A diffuse sense of something . . .

Try to remember which muscles to move. He had gone through life with instant feedback from every fiber, anchoring him in his body, every gesture suggesting the next. Now he had to analyze precisely. How did he make his arm rise? Muscles contracted to pull on one side of the arm and shoulder. Others relaxed to let the arm swing. He tried it.

Was there an answering weight? Faint, too faint. Maybe his imagination.

The right arm could be jutting up, and he wouldn't know it. The attendants would see it, though, and patch into him, ask what was going on . . . unless they weren't around. Unless they had gone off for coffee, leaving the sagging old body to stage down gradually into long-term stasis, with the medical monitor checking to be sure nothing failed in the ancient carcass.

Suppose the arm worked. Even if somebody saw it, was that what he wanted? If they turned his head back on, what would he do?

Demand his rights? He didn't have any. He had already signed the required documents, read through the contracts, stared at the legalese. *I, Carlos Farendez, being of sound mind and body . . .* All taken care of. The attendants certainly had dealt before with people who protested, demanded to see their lawyer, bright minds trapped inside failed machinery. They would slide him into a slot, no matter what he said. *For his own good, y'know.*

Despairing, he stopped his concentration, willed the muscles to go suddenly slack.

And was rewarded with an answering *thump*.

It had hit the table. It damned well worked.

He waited. Nothing came to him in the blackness. No attendant came tapping in to correct his mistake.

He was probably alone. Where?

Carlos found his memories strangely dim and diffuse. He could see the street this morning: an orange sun behind clouds . . . taking the bus . . . the chill winter breeze blowing trash down the sidewalk, numbing his ears . . . being surprised at how rundown this part of town was nowadays . . . walking down Wilshire past the new Conway building, first big one since the earthquake . . . a gray, dusty city, starved for water, not lively the way it had been in the '90s . . . he'd wondered about finally moving out . . . panting as he shuffled up the hill . . . the usual irritating wait at the Institute . . . they always thought the old ones had plenty of time to waste . . . then the papers, always more papers to sign, never time to read them . . . the nurse who took his clothes away . . . getting into the diagnostic sheath . . . hooking up, the little bites of the incisions . . .

He must still be there. Not already in a slot, or else he wouldn't be able to think clearly. On a medmon slab, then. He tried to remember what they looked like. The access terminals were on both sides, mirroring the body. So maybe, if it stretched, the right hand could reach half the input switchings.

He concentrated and brought the arm up again. The hand probably worked; it would've been too much trouble to disconnect it while the arm stayed live. Remembering carefully, he lowered the arm, rotating it—

A thump. Someone approaching? No, too close. The arm had fallen. Balance was going to be hard. He practiced rotating the arm without raising it. No way to know if he was successful, but some moves seemed correct, familiar, while others did not. He worked without feedback, trying to summon up the exact sensation of turning the arm. Dipping it to the side, over the edge. Working the fingers.

He stopped. If he hit the wrong control, he could turn off the arm. Without external nerves, there was no way to tell if he was doing the right thing.

Pure gamble. If he had been able to, Carlos would have shrugged. What the hell.

He stabbed with straightened fingers. Nothing. He fumbled and somehow knew through dull patterns that the fingers were striking the side of the slab. The knowledge came from below, some kind of holistic sensation from the thin nerve nets deep inside him. The body could not be wholly cut up into pieces; information spread, and the mute kidneys and liver and intestines knew in some dim way what went on outside.

A waning answering pressure told him that his fingers had closed on something, were squeezing it. He made the fingers turn.

Nothing happened. Not a knob, then. A button?

He stabbed down. In his sinus cavities he felt slight jolts. He must be smacking the slab hard, to do that. With no feedback there was no way to judge force. He stabbed; a jolt. Again. Again—

A cold tremor ran up his right calf. Pain flooded in. His leg was in spasm. It jerked on the slab, striking the medmon. The sudden rush of sensations startled him. In the heady surge he could hardly tell pain from pleasure.

The leg banged on the slab like a crazed animal. His automatic system was trying to maintain body temperature by muscle spasms, sucking the energy out of the sugar left in the tissues. A standard reaction; that was one reason why he was shut down.

But he had activated a neural web, that was the point. He stabbed blindly with his fingers again.

A welling coldness in his midsection. Again.

More cold, now in the right foot. Again.

A prickly sensation on his lips, on his cheeks. But not full senses; he could not feel his chest or arms. He started to press another button and then stopped, thinking.

So far he had been lucky. He was opening the sensory nets. Most of his right side was transmitting external data. His leg was jerking less now as he brought it under control.

But if he hit the shutdown button for his right arm next, he was finished. He would lie there helpless until the technicians came back.

Carlos worked the arm back onto the slab. He made it shift awkwardly across his chest. His motor control must extend into his upper chest and shoulders to let him do this, but without any input from there he did not know how much he could make work.

He willed the muscles to lurch to the left. A strange impression of tilting came into him. A tension somewhere. Muscles straining, locked, clenched and reaching, stretching. Again—

A warm hardness on his cheek. His nose pressed against it but he had no sense of smell. The slab top. He had rolled himself part way over.

He felt a gathering, diffuse weariness. The arm muscles were broadcasting to the surrounding body their agony, fed by the buildup of exhausted sugar-bearing molecules.

No time to rest. The muscles would just have to keep working. He willed the arm to reach over the left side of the slab. He could feel nothing, but now he could make no fatal mistake.

He punched down at random, searching. A spike of pain shot through his left side. Behind it came biting cold. Slabs of muscle began shaking violently, sending rippling pain through his left side.

He stabbed down with fingers again. Light poured in on him. He had hit the optical nerve net. A gaudy, rich redness. He realized his eyes were still closed. He opened them, and yellow flooded in. He closed them against the glare and punched down again.

The crisp, chill hospital smell. Again.

Sound washed over him. A mechanical clanking, a distant buzz, the whirr of air circulators. No voices.

He squinted. He was lying on a white slab, staring up at fluorescent lights. Now that he could see, he got back the rest of his nets quickly.

He reached up toward his neck—and his hand went the other way. He stopped it, moved the fingers tentatively. His arm was coming from above his head, reaching down . . . but that was impossible. He moved the other arm. It came into his vision the same way, from above.

Something was wrong with him. He closed his eyes. What could make . . . ?

He rolled over partway and looked around the medmon bay. The sign on the door leaped out at him. It was upside down. He reached out, clutched the edge of the slab. It was upside down, too.

That was it. When the eye took light and cast it on the retina, ordinary optics inverted the image. The retinal nerves filtered that signal and set it upright for the brain.

So the med tech had screwed that up, too. The retinal nerves weren't working right. That might be easy to fix, just move a fine-point fiber junction a fraction of a millimeter. But Carlos couldn't, didn't know how. He would have to manage.

Su madre, Carlos thought, and began to fumble with the thicket

of leads that snaked over his body. It was easier if he didn't look at what he was doing. He had to disconnect carefully the tap-ins at nerve nexus points. The big knot of them at the nape of his neck was hard to detach. It jerked free. He felt a hot, diffuse pain from the region, spreading up into his skull. He had read something about that. The nerves were exposed, sending scattershot impressions through the area, provoking spasms in the muscles.

He rolled over and studied the work table next to the slab. It was a jumble of connectors, microelectronics, and coils of nearly invisible wires. There was a patch that looked the right shape. He reached out for it and missed. His brain saw his arm moving up and corrected, always in the wrong direction.

It took three tries before he could override his own coordination. He snagged the patch and nearly dropped it. Carefully he brought it to his head. The floppy oval of wires fitted over the gaping hole at the back of his neck. He fiddled with it until it slid *snick* into place. The pain tapered off.

He sat up. Spasms shot through him. He gasped. Pain blossomed with every move. But he felt lean and fully awake and deeply angry. He was in a deserted medical bay. A fine sensor mesh covered his body up to his shoulders.

He studied the liquid-optical readouts on his medical monitor. The program profile was mostly numbers. He couldn't tilt his head far enough over to read the upside-down numbers. He worked on reading them directly. After a moment it wasn't so hard. The winking digital sequences were complicated and not like anything he remembered. He identified blood pressure, heart rate. The rest was meaningless. He'd never paid much attention to the hardware before, and now he regretted it.

He got to his feet, shaky and light-headed. It was good to have his own chemistry back. He was tempted to rest for a moment and let the endless river of sensations wash over him. Even this sterile room of barren white light was lurid, packed with details, smells, sensations. He had never loved life so much.

But he wasn't safe. Coffee breaks didn't last forever. He would have to find his clothes, get out, call his lawyer—

He started for a side door. The first few steps taught him to keep his head tilted down, toward his feet. He had to move his eyes the opposite way, though, to shift his vision. He bumped into the med-mon and nearly fell over a desk. After a moment he could navigate around things. He went carefully, feeling each twinge of lancing pain as his left side protested. His right arm ached and trembled from spasm.

He reached the door, opened it slightly, peered through. The equipment beyond was hard to recognize upside down. Clothes on pegs jutted straight up. Chairs clung to the ceiling. He fought down a sense of vertigo. His eyes were telling his brain that he was standing on the ceiling, and somewhere inside him alarm systems were struggling to be heeded.

There were open drawers of surgical instruments, a washup station, electronics gear. It looked like a preparation room. He eased through.

There was a lab coat on a chair. He took halting steps over to it. It was easier to manipulate things if he closed his eyes, going by feel alone. Too bad he couldn't walk that way.

The lab smock fit pretty well. It would conceal most of the fine sensor webbing that covered him. Not all, though. He bent down. A nausea swept into him, and he closed his eyes. He felt along his leg. Fingers found a zip-lock in the webbing. He opened it. The stuff peeled back slowly, rasping against his skin. He gave up hopes of getting it all off and settled for stripping it from his feet. He worked the stiff, wiry fabric up and bunched it above his knees.

Now he probably looked like an ordinary patient. The sensor net stopped at his shoulders, just peeking out at the collar of the coat. He looked around, but there were no shoes. *Hell with it*, he thought. *No time.*

He crossed the room and pushed a door open a crack. Footsteps coming. He let the door close and waited. Nobody came in. He opened it again and listened to the distant murmur of conversations, people passing, ordinary office noise.

The impersonal drone of efficiency. Now that he thought about it, he didn't have much of a chance. It wasn't enough to just call his lawyer. He had to get away clean, have time to prove that the med techs had made a mistake. An old man stumbling around in a lab coat, trying to get out of the building . . . No, he needed something more.

Carlos looked around, even though it made his head swim. *If only he could get his damned eyes fixed.* But he didn't know how. What else, then?

The surgical section. He shuffled over to it. Gleaming instruments hung in the open drawer, defying gravity. He picked out a scalpel and gingerly slipped it into the coat pocket. He'd never used a weapon in his life, but this was the only thing he could think of.

Back to the door. This time he opened it and stepped out with what he hoped was a casual air. He clenched his teeth to fight off the panicky impulse that swept through him. In one direction, end-

less offices. He turned, gritting his teeth at the nausea. Down there, some daylight. He started shuffling that way.

Medical people passed, not even looking at him. For the first time Carlos didn't mind the blank-faced stares that looked right through the anonymous patient. He tried reading signs along the hallway but couldn't. He reached the exit door, leading into an outdoor stairwell, and stopped. A big sign said EMERGENCY EXIT ONLY. There was an alarm trigger above it.

He backed away. *Mierda seca*.

He had to keep moving, get farther away from the med bay. Any minute now the tech would come back. Carlos moved away and reached an intersection of corridors. More labs, offices. He went right, walking parallel to the outer wall of the building. Up ahead a dozen people came out of a meeting room and stood talking. He didn't want to pass them. He turned aside and saw a door. It opened. He stepped in and found himself in a stockroom, not much bigger than a closet. There were keys in the inside doorknob. He turned them, locking the door.

How long could he wait? Not very. Give the hall time to clear. He counted to a hundred, studying the cabinets of boxed supplies. He tried to think of some way he could use this stuff, but most of the labels he couldn't understand.

When the hundred ran out, he let himself out, pocketing the keys. The hall was empty. He walked slowly away. He was getting used to the vision now. People went by him. Up ahead he saw some more natural daylight. He walked faster.

"Say, you aren't supposed to be—"

Carlos turned. A young nurse was following him.

"—in this part of the . . ." Her eyes widened. "But you can't be . . . I just left you . . ."

"You're mistaken," he said as calmly as he could. "I'm just getting some exercise, lady."

"No, you're the man on slab C, I know. You can't get up now; you're in no condition to be out."

She touched his sleeve, and panic seized him. It was impossible to tell what her expression meant, upside down. Was she being kindly? If she kept after him—

"Come on, I'll help you back—"

His hand closed on the keys in his pocket, then the scalpel.

"Look at this," he said, bringing out the scalpel.

She gasped. He put his hand back in the pocket, holding the scalpel, and whispered, "Now turn around and walk back that way."

Her eyes went from his face to the pocket and back again, confused.

You can't—"

"Si, I can. Walk."

She hesitated a moment more. He took her arm roughly and pushed her along, feeling suddenly strong. "You're taking a patient for a stroll. Walk."

She did. He got her back to the stockroom without attracting any notice. He pushed her into it and was closing the door, fishing the keys out of his pocket, when she blurted, "There's no need for you to—"

"You be quiet in here, understand?" he said as harshly as he could.

"We'll help you, you're not ready to—"

"To get filed away in a slot, no, I'm damned well not."

"No, no, you—"

Carlos closed the door, locked it. He walked away rapidly. His heart thumped wildly, and he felt a rising fear.

He was near the exit when the banging started. He looked back. The nurse was pounding on the door. People stopped in the corridor, puzzled.

Carlos turned and hurried out the exit. He was at the edge of a parking lot. He walked along a sidewalk until a voice behind him called out, "Hey! Hey!"

He rounded a corner and started running. Bare feet slapped the warm concrete, and he gulped fresh air greedily. He felt a rush of power in his body, a sudden zing in the firm pull of his legs as he sprinted down the sidewalk between tall buildings.

More shouts behind him. He worked his way between slabs of concrete, around a stairwell, and down through bushes on a hillside. The upside-down vision made it hard, but he was learning to deal with it. He kept his head down and managed to walk quickly, bent over, working his way down the slope. With luck nobody would be able to see him from above. He was panting but not rapidly. *Putting me in the slots, eh? I'll show them who's too old.*

A siren shrieked in the distance. Carlos reached the bottom of the slope and glanced around to get his bearings. Nausea still clutched at him if he moved his head too fast. *Let's see . . . It's hard to tell upside down, the streets look so different.*

He had always walked up to the Institute from Wilshire, but this direction . . . He peered at the rosy warm sun. He was facing north, so there should be a little dog-leg to the south if he turned . . . but that way was blocked by a massive wing of the Institute.

He went ahead, through more of the Institute grounds. Then he angled west, keeping in the shelter of some trees. In a hundred

meters the trees ended, and he came out onto a sidewalk. It wasn't Wilshire. He must have gotten turned around. It was a narrow little street, and cars went by quickly. No pedestrians. Lucky; he was pretty damned conspicuous.

He went down a block and crossed the street, not paying much attention to anything except the way he had come. Nobody following—good. But they'd be on him pretty soon. The cops would patrol the streets and pick him up. He looked for a restaurant or something to duck into, but there were only apartment buildings along this street. Their entrances were locked. Ahead, though, was a little city park he remembered. He could cut across there, maybe make a call from one of the phone booths by Wilshire and Rodeo Drive.

He crossed the street and entered the park. It was surprisingly empty for this time of day. He circled around the duck pond and trotted under a long line of sycamores. At Wilshire he turned left, angling back toward—

The Conway building wasn't there. In its place was a strange sculpted thing made of glass and a rubbery-looking stuff.

Carlos stood frozen for a moment, trying to get his bearings. This was Wilshire, that was for sure. Wasn't Rodeo over that way?

The inverted vision had probably screwed up his sense of direction. In the distance towered the Sashiko building, but next to it there was something that fanned out into an outrageous plume-like top floor. Now that he looked closely, he noticed that the people were kind of odd, wearing clothes that bagged in funny places and were cut the wrong way.

Carlos backed away from the street, into the park. He ran back toward the duck pond. It was easier to run than to try to straighten out his swirl of emotions and questions.

He reached the pond and looked up at the looming bulk of the Institute. Two policemen were walking toward him, coming around the pond. He turned without thinking and fled.

Around a stand of eucalyptus, down a path—and there were two more police, weapons drawn. It was hard to read their expressions, upside down.

"Okay, easy, fella."

He turned back, saw them closing in behind.

"Just let us have that knife."

Carlos yelled, "Only if you don't take me back in there."

"Can't guarantee anything 'til you drop the knife."

"I'm not going back!"

"C'mon, they say you're not even halfway through your cycling."

"Not halfway *dead*, you mean."

"Huh?" The nearest cop stopped, puzzled. He lowered the baton in his hand.

His partner said roughly, "The knife, fella."

"No, look," the nearest one said. "I think I know what's going on." He pointed at Carlos. "Pull up those sleeves. Unzip that sensor fabric."

Carlos hesitated, turning to see that the two behind him kept their distance. They could rush him easily, but they didn't seem to be preparing for that. But he wasn't going to give up the scalpel, either. It was all he had.

"C'mon, we haven't got all day."

Carlos peered at his right hand. He had avoided looking at his own body because that had disoriented him even further. Upside down, everything looked different. Now he reached down and unfastened the zip-lock running along his palm and peeled the webbing back. The hand was bone white. No speckling of liver spots. No lines or creases.

"See what I mean?" the policeman said.

"No, I . . . I . . . what've they done to me?"

"You've got a whole new body. Not just the old one with the cancer cured—that's what you had, why they put you away fast."

"New . . . ?"

"Sure. A fresh body, cloned off your own cells, and your brain transplanted into it."

"Then this is . . . how long has it been?"

"Thirty-eight years, the tech told me."

"Thirty-eight . . ." He rolled up his sleeve. The flesh was young, powerfully muscled. No wonder he'd been able to escape. The way his body had responded, crisp and sure, the heady pleasure of bunching muscles, the tang of fresh tastes and smells, the *zest* of it—

"The knife, fella."

"Huh? Oh." Carlos pulled the scalpel from his pocket and offered it, hilt first.

"Man, you're sure some customer," the nearest cop said, taking it. "Toughest case they ever had. Once you get out, fella, you're gonna tear this town up."

Carlos smiled. They led him down to Wilshire. He looked back at the Institute, towering over the lush green park. Carlos remembered waking up—how long ago? half an hour? Not much more.

And the first thing he'd thought of was that his settled, comfortable life might get interrupted. He'd been afraid of getting sleep-slotted, afraid of the future—of losing his neighborhood, his friends, the skills he had. An old man's habits of mind. Just holding on.

But thirty-eight years wasn't so long. He could pick up some of the threads. Find old friends, make new ones. Learn a skill.

He'd have to stop jumping to conclusions about himself. Stop living inside the cramped horizons of an old man.

Carlos sucked in a rich lungful of aromatic, humid air. He was *new*. And the future was all he—or anyone else—had left. ●



MARTIN GARDNER

HOME SWEET HOME

SECOND SOLUTION TO HOME SWEET HOME

(from page 37)

The alien is describing a baseball player sliding safely home to win an important game.

Speaking of baseball, here are two simple questions that even baseball fans often answer incorrectly:

1. Suppose the home team, in a game that does not go beyond the standard number of innings, made two runs each time it came to bat, and the visiting team made one run each time at bat. What's the final score?

2. How many outs are in one inning?

See page 57 for the answers.



THE EXAMINATION OF EX-EMPEROR MING

by Cyn Mason

art: Odbert

The author of this first sale tells us
her life's ambition is to be kidnapped by Fairies.
Failing that, she may turn to piracy.
She currently lives in the University district
in Seattle with an OWC (Obligatory Writer's Cat)
in the last holdout of the mad hippies,
majoring in psychology.

There were deep burn marks on the road to the fortress. Many turrets stood against the walls, lending ominous meaning to the scars. A lone figure stood at the gates, knocking.

"Halt, fool! Who dares disturb the solitude of Ming the Merciless?" The echoes rolled over the hills, precipitating a small landslide half a kilometer away.

"Not bad," commented the fool. "I see you have the 'Voice of Authority' option on your subterranean speakers. I'm here about the audit."

Instantly the turrets spat forth assorted rays, engulfing him in flames. Ignoring them, the burning figure calmly walked to the castle gates and kicked them. The turrets ceased firing as the gates fell inward. A mob of robot gladiators rushed him as he stepped inside. The man grabbed one, ignoring the others as they variously beat, slashed, and fired at him, and politely requested, "Will you please tell Mr. Ming that Special Agent David Klayven from the Intragalactic Revenue Korps is here?"

Not programmed to deal with men who refused to be burnt to a crisp, the mechanism blinked photoreceptors and ran out of the room. Klayven followed it into an opulent suite, to a small room containing a round pool filled with water and the former emperor of Mongo, soaking in scented bubbles while several partly clothed women stood by. They giggled at Klayven's entrance. Ming did not, preferring to turn purple.

"What is the meaning of this? Who are you? Guards! *Guards!* Destroy this intruder! Guards!"

Obediently, the robot turned and fired. The backwash of close range blasters brushed one side of the pool. A violent explosion of steam fogged the room as the women all screamed and ran like hell. When the air cleared, the robot was lying in smoking ruin as the pool spilled hot water and parboiled ex-emperor across Klayven's shins.

"Special Agent Klayven, Intragalactic Revenue Korps," said the agent, offering Ming a hand. "I'm here about the examination of your planetary tax returns for the last two years."

"What? The I.R.K.? You're here about the audit!" snarled Ming, ignoring the hand. "Get out! Leave now and I may let you live."

"Displays of violence against an I.R.K. agent in lawful performance of his duties carry heavy penalties. You've already incurred several; are you trying for more? Why don't we just get down to business and get this over with? If you'll just produce your books and records . . ."

"Records!" interrupted Ming. "I barely escaped Mongo with my life, let alone records. You can't just walk in here and start demanding to see my books. What about my rights? Tyrants have rights just as much as anyone!"

"Intragalactic Revenue Code gives me the authority to conduct an immediate examination of your returns complete with all the substantiation you can provide. If you cannot substantiate your deductions, they will be disallowed and the tax recomputed."

"But I haven't got any substantiation! What are you talking about? What deductions? Oh, Hell, get this stupid audit over with and get out! First some jerk goes and runs me off my own planet, then you blood-suckers from the I.R.K. start in on me. Get done and get out!" Draping a soggy towel around himself, he stalked into the suite adjoining. Klayven followed, opening his briefcase.

The agent handed Ming copies of his planetary tax returns. "Please look these over." Sitting at a table, Ming watched Klayven take a stack of papers out. "These are the items being questioned."

"That many?" demanded Ming incredulously.

"That's right," said Klayven cheerfully. "Let's get down to specifics. First, you claimed a large business expense here. What exactly was this cost to you?"

"Oh, *that*. It was the expense of keeping up my torture chambers and dungeons. You've no idea what it costs to maintain a reign of terror these days."

"Torture chambers, eh? That's totally unallowable."

"What? It's a completely legitimate business expense!"

"No; I.R.K. Code clearly states that torture and dungeon expenses are simply for your personal pleasure, and hence disallowed. It isn't considered so much an expense as the way you chose to spend your income. Speaking of which, I have reason to believe that on line forty-four you understated your adjusted gross income. Look at this." The agent pulled out a meter-long list. "The I.R.K. has a computer program that automatically matches up all information received from banks, stocks, and pensions against the information on your return. These are the credits paid into your accounts that weren't included in your income."

The former tyrant paled as he scanned the list. "How sloppy of the accountant to have left that out," he commented weakly. "We hired the best accountant on Mongo to do the returns! How could he have missed it?" Klayven smiled.

"Speaking of the accountant, you show a considerable cost in fees paid to him on this schedule, and some doubt exists as to whether

it was actually paid. Do you have a receipt to show?"

"Who says it wasn't paid? How would you know?"

"Possibly the fact you had him beheaded for trying to collect could have something to do with it."

"Details, details. I'm a very busy man. You can't expect me to recall every single beheading. All right, if you want to get down to business, what would it take to make you forget this whole issue?" Ming's expression was coldly calculating. "Would you like to own my harem?"

"Are you aware of the penalties for attempting to bribe an agent of the I.R.K.? Your bribe itself is forfeit, as well as penalties, on top of the taxes, interest, and penalties you already owe."

"You fool! Nobody need know about this but ourselves! Think of the girls! Beauties, and talented, every one of them."

Klayven looked at him with pity. "You're completely wrong. I.R.K. Central already knows. I'm in constant communication with them, through the telemetry in my briefcase, and this conversation is being recorded."

"What!" Ming stared, pop-eyed, at Klayven. Finally he said, "I don't see any reason to go on with this. You've got that stack of questioned items and I haven't got any records. We can't show you anything to back up my deductions, so why bother? Besides, what else can you do to me? My empire is gone, my harem is lost, what can I lose?"

"Well, the credits from selling this place should help a little in paying off your bill," said Klayven helpfully.

"What?" Ming yelled again, clutching at his towel. "You can't!"

"Since you've chosen to terminate the examination, the computers at I.R.K. Central have recomputed your tax, plus failure to pay penalties from the date the tax would have been due, plus interest, plus penalties for the destruction of the previous three robotic auditors that I.R.K. sent out to . . ."

Ming interrupted, "What robotic auditors? That's got to be a mistake!"

"No, we sent them out to examine your returns. Your defenses destroyed each while it was attempting to gain entry, but fortunately each was equipped with telemetry."

"You can't blame me for destroying robots I didn't even know about!"

"Somebody has to pay for them. You broke them. Then there's the penalty for attempted bribery, and the total amount now due is just printing out in my briefcase." He handed a statement to the ex-

emperor. "There you go."

"That's more than *five* times the tax I paid as Emperor of Mongo! You've bankrupted me! They'll be calling me Ming the Penniless!" he shrieked, his voice cracking. "How do you expect me to live? Do you think the Galaxy is full of job openings for cruel despots? Guards! *Guards!*" The robots assembled at the door. "I order you to destroy this intruder if it means leveling the castle!"

One gladiator stepped ahead of the rest. "We cannot obey you," it stated.

"Why?"

"We no longer belong to you," it answered, and left.

"That's correct," Klayven said. "I.R.K. Central just placed a tax levy on each of your accounts, and filed a tax lien on this place."

"What can I *do*?" gasped Ming. "I'm ruined." His face was gray, the pupils dilated.

"Well, wait a minute. Possibly I have a proposition for you."

There were deep burn marks on the road to the fortress. Many peculiar turrets stood against the walls, lending ominous meaning to the scars. A lone figure stood at the gates, knocking.

A challenge shook the hills. "Who dares approach?"

"Mr. Vader? Special Agent Ming, from the Intragalactic Revenue Korps. I'm here about the audit." ●



MARTIN GARDNER

HOME SWEET HOME

SOLUTION TO HOME SWEET HOME

(from page 52)

1. Did you guess 18 to 9? Wrong! It's 16 to 9. The winning home team would not come to bat in the final inning.

2. Six.



A LETTER FROM THE CLEARYS

by Connie Willis

art: Broeck Steadman

Connie Willis's last
appearance in
these pages
was in our February 15, 1982, issue with
the extraordinary "Firewatch."
Her first novel, *Water Witch*,
co-written
with Cynthia Felice, is out from Ace Books.



There was a letter from the Clearys at the post office. I put it in my backpack along with Mrs. Talbot's magazine and went outside to untie Stitch.

He had pulled his leash out as far as it would go and was sitting around the corner, half-strangled, watching a robin. Stitch never barks, not even at birds. He didn't even yip when Dad stitched up his paw. He just sat there the way we found him on the front porch, shivering a little and holding his paw up for Dad to look at. Mrs. Talbot says he's a terrible watchdog, but I'm glad he doesn't bark. Rusty barked all the time and look where it got him.

I had to pull Stitch back around the corner to where I could get enough slack to untie him. That took some doing, because he really liked that robin. "It's a sign of spring, isn't it, fella?" I said, trying to get at the knot with my fingernails. I didn't loosen the knot, but I managed to break one of my fingernails off to the quick. Great. Mom will demand to know if I've noticed any other fingernails breaking.

My hands are a real mess. This winter I've gotten about a hundred burns on the back of my hands from that stupid wood stove of ours. One spot, just above my wrist, I keep burning over and over so it never has a chance to heal. The stove isn't big enough, and when I try to jam a log in that's too long, that same spot hits the inside of the stove every time. My stupid brother David won't saw them off to the right length. I've asked him and asked him to please cut them shorter, but he doesn't pay any attention to me.

I asked Mom if she would please tell him not to saw the logs so long, but she didn't. She never criticizes David. As far as she's concerned he can't do anything wrong just because he's twenty-three and was married.

"He does it on purpose," I told her. "He's hoping I'll burn to death."

"Paranoia is the number-one killer of fourteen-year-old girls," Mom said. She always says that. It makes me so mad I feel like killing her. "He doesn't do it on purpose. You need to be more careful with the stove, that's all." But all the time she was holding my hand and looking at the big burn that won't heal like it was a time bomb set to go off.

"We need a bigger stove," I said, and yanked my hand away. We do need a bigger one. Dad closed up the fireplace and put the woodstove in when the gas bill was getting out of sight, but it's just a little one, because Mom didn't want one that would stick way out in the living room. Anyway, we were only going to use it in the evenings.

We won't get a new one. They are all too busy working on the stupid greenhouse. Maybe spring will come early, and my hand will have half a chance to heal. I know better. Last winter the snow kept up till the middle of June, and this is only March. Stitch's robin is going to freeze his little tail if he doesn't head back south. Dad says that last year was unusual, that the weather will be back to normal this year, but he doesn't believe it either or he wouldn't be building the greenhouse.

As soon as I let go of Stitch's leash, he backed around the corner like a good boy and sat there waiting for me to stop sucking my finger and untie him. "We'd better get a move on," I told him. "Mom'll have a fit." I was supposed to go by the general store to try and get some tomato seeds, but the sun was already pretty far west, and I had at least a half-hour's walk home. If I got home after dark, I'd get sent to bed without supper, and then I wouldn't get to read the letter. Besides, if I didn't go to the general store today they'd have to let me go tomorrow, and I wouldn't have to work on the stupid greenhouse.

Sometimes I feel like blowing it up. There's sawdust and mud on everything, and David dropped one of the pieces of plastic on the stove while they were cutting it and it melted onto the stove and stank to high heaven. But nobody else even notices the mess; they're too busy talking about how wonderful it's going to be to have home-grown watermelon and corn and tomatoes next summer.

I don't see how it's going to be any different from last summer. The only things that came up at all were the lettuce and the potatoes. The lettuce was about as tall as my broken fingernail and the potatoes were as hard as rocks. Mrs. Talbot said it was the altitude, but Dad said it was the funny weather and this crummy Pike's Peak granite that passes for soil around here. He went up to the little library in the back of the general store and got a do-it-yourself book on greenhouses and started tearing everything up, and now even Mrs. Talbot is crazy about the idea.

The other day I told them, "Paranoia is the number-one killer of people at this *altitude*," but they were too busy cutting slats and stapling plastic to pay any attention to me.

Stitch walked along ahead of me, straining at his leash, and as soon as we were across the highway, I took it off. He never runs away like Rusty used to. Anyway, it's impossible to keep him out of the road, and the times I've tried keeping him on his leash, he dragged me out into the middle and I got in trouble with Dad over leaving footprints. So I keep to the frozen edges of the road, and he

moseys along, stopping to sniff at potholes; when he gets behind, I whistle at him and he comes running right up.

I walked pretty fast. It was getting chilly out, and I'd only worn my sweater. I stopped at the top of the hill and whistled at Stitch. We still had a mile to go. I could see the Peak from where I was standing. Maybe Dad is right about spring coming. There was hardly any snow on the Peak, and the burned part didn't look quite as dark as it did last fall, like maybe the trees are coming back.

Last year at this time the whole peak was solid white. I remember because that was when Dad and David and Mr. Talbot went hunting and it snowed every day and they didn't get back for almost a month. Mom just about went crazy before they got back. She kept going up to the road to watch for them even though the snow was five feet deep and she was leaving footprints as big as the Abominable Snowman's. She took Rusty with her even though he hated the snow about as much as Stitch hates the dark. And she took a gun. One time she tripped over a branch and fell down in the snow. She sprained her ankle and was almost frozen stiff by the time she made it back to the house. I felt like saying, "Paranoia is the number-one killer of mothers," but Mrs. Talbot butted in and said the next time I had to go with her and how this was what happened when people were allowed to go places by themselves, which meant me going to the post office. I said I could take care of myself, and Mom told me not to be rude to Mrs. Talbot and Mrs. Talbot was right, I should go with her the next time.

She wouldn't wait till her ankle was better. She bandaged it up and we went the very next day. She didn't say a word the whole trip, just limped through the snow. She never even looked up till we got to the road. The snow had stopped for a little while, and the clouds had lifted enough so you could see the Peak. It was like a black-and-white photograph, the gray sky and the black trees and the white mountain. The Peak was completely covered with snow. You couldn't make out the toll road at all.

We were supposed to hike up the Peak with the Clearys.

When we got back to the house, I said, "The summer before last the Clearys never came."

Mom took off her mittens and stood by the stove, pulling off chunks of frozen snow. "Of course they didn't come, Lynn," she said.

Snow from my coat was dripping onto the stove and sizzling. "I didn't mean *that*," I said. "They were supposed to come the first week in June. Right after Rick graduated. So what happened? Did they just decide not to come or what?"

"I don't know," she said, pulling off her hat and shaking her hair out. Her bangs were all wet.

"Maybe they wrote to tell you they'd changed their plans," Mrs. Talbot said. "Maybe the post office lost the letter."

"It doesn't matter," Mom said.

"You'd think they'd have written or something," I said.

"Maybe the post office put the letter in somebody else's box," Mrs. Talbot said.

"It doesn't matter," Mom said, and went to hang her coat over the line in the kitchen. She wouldn't say another word about them. When Dad got home I asked him too about the Clearys, but he was too busy telling about the trip to pay any attention to me.

Stitch didn't come. I whistled again and then started back after him. He was all the way at the bottom of the hill, his nose buried in something. "Come on," I said, and he turned around and then I could see why he hadn't come. He'd gotten himself tangled up in one of the electric wires that was down. He'd managed to get the cable wound around his legs like he does his leash sometimes, and the harder he tried to get out, the more he got tangled up.

He was right in the middle of the road. I stood on the edge of the road, trying to figure out a way to get to him without leaving footprints. The road was pretty much frozen at the top of the hill, but down here snow was still melting and running across the road in big rivers. I put my toe out into the mud, and my sneaker sank in a good half-inch, so I backed up, rubbed out the toe print with my hand, and wiped my hand on my jeans. I tried to think what to do. Dad is as paranoid about footprints as Mom is about my hands, but he is even worse about my being out after dark. If I didn't make it back in time, he might even tell me I couldn't go to the post office anymore.

Stitch was coming as close as he ever would to barking. He'd gotten the wire around his neck and was choking himself. "All right," I said. "I'm coming." I jumped out as far as I could into one of the rivers and then waded the rest of the way to Stitch, looking back a couple of times to make sure the water was washing away the footprints.

I unwound Stitch and threw the loose end of the wire over to the side of the road where it dangled from the pole, all ready to hang Stitch next time he comes along.

"You stupid dog," I said. "Now hurry!" and I sprinted back to the side of the road and up the hill in my sopping wet sneakers. He ran about five steps and stopped to sniff at a tree. "Come on!" I said.

"It's getting dark. Dark!"

He was past me like a shot and halfway down the hill. Stitch is afraid of the dark. I know, there's no such thing in dogs. But Stitch really is. Usually I tell him, "Paranoia is the number-one killer of dogs," but right now I wanted him to hurry before my feet started to freeze. I started running, and we got to the bottom of the hill about the same time.

Stitch stopped at the driveway of the Talbot's house. Our house wasn't more than a few hundred feet from where I was standing, on the other side of the hill. Our house is down in kind of a well formed by hills on all sides. It's so deep and hidden you'd never even know it's there. You can't even see the smoke from our wood stove over the top of the Talbot's hill. There's a shortcut through the Talbot's property and down through the woods to our back door, but I don't take it anymore. "Dark, Stitch," I said sharply, and started running again. Stitch kept right at my heels.

The Peak was turning pink by the time I got to our driveway. Stitch peed on the spruce tree about a hundred times before I got it dragged back across the dirt driveway. It's a real big tree. Last summer Dad and David chopped it down and then made it look like it had fallen across the road. It completely covers up where the driveway meets the road, but the trunk is full of splinters, and I scraped my hand right in the same place as always. Great.

I made sure Stitch and I hadn't left any marks on the road (except for the marks he always leaves—another dog could find us in a minute, that's probably how Stitch showed up on our front porch, he smelled Rusty) and then got under cover of the hill as fast as I could. Stitch isn't the only one who gets nervous after dark. And besides, my feet were starting to hurt. Stitch was really paranoid tonight. He didn't even quit running after we were in sight of the house.

David was outside, bringing in a load of wood. I could tell just by looking at it that they were all the wrong length. "Cutting it kind of close, aren't you?" he said. "Did you get the tomato seeds?"

"No," I said. "I brought you something else, though. I brought everybody something."

I went on in. Dad was rolling out plastic on the living-room floor. Mrs. Talbot was holding one end for him. Mom was holding the card table, still folded up, waiting for them to finish so she could set it up in front of the stove for supper. Nobody even looked up. I unslung my backpack and took out Mrs. Talbot's magazine and the letter.

"There was a letter at the post office," I said. "From the Clearys."

They all looked up.

"Where did you find it?" Dad said.

"On the floor, mixed in with all the third-class stuff. I was looking for a magazine for Mrs. Talbot."

Mom leaned the card table against the couch and sat down. Mrs. Talbot looked blank.

"The Clearys were our best friends," I explained to her. "From Illinois. They were supposed to come see us the summer before last. We were going to hike up Pike's Peak and everything."

David banged in the door. He looked at Mom sitting on the couch and Dad and Mrs. Talbot still standing there holding the plastic like a couple of statues. "What's wrong?" he said,

"Lynn says she found a letter from the Clearys today," Dad said.

David dumped the logs on the hearth. One of them rolled onto the carpet and stopped at Mom's feet. Neither of them bent over to pick it up.

"Shall I read it out loud?" I said, looking at Mrs. Talbot. I was still holding her magazine. I opened up the envelope and took out the letter.

" 'Dear Janice and Todd and everybody,' " I read. " 'How are things in the glorious West? We're raring to come out and see you, though we may not make it quite as soon as we hoped. How are Carla and David and the baby? I can't wait to see little David. Is he walking yet? I bet Grandma Janice is so proud she's busting her britches. Is that right? Do you westerners wear britches, or have you all gone to designer jeans?' "

David was standing by the fireplace. He put his head down across his arms on the mantelpiece.

" 'I'm sorry I haven't written, but we were very busy with Rick's graduation, and anyway I thought we would beat the letter out to Colorado. But now it looks like there's going to be a slight change in plans. Rick has definitely decided to join the Army. Richard and I have talked ourselves blue in the face, but I guess we've just made matters worse. We can't even get him to wait to join until after the trip to Colorado. He says we'd spend the whole trip trying to talk him out of it, which is true, I guess. I'm just so worried about him. The Army! Rick says I worry too much, which is true too, I guess, but what if there was a war?' "

Mom bent over and picked up the log that David had dropped and laid it on the couch beside her.

" 'If it's okay with you out there in the Golden West, we'll wait until Rick is done with basic the first week in July and then all

come out. Please write and let us know if this is okay. I'm sorry to switch plans on you like this at the last minute, but look at it this way: you have a whole extra month to get into shape for hiking up Pike's Peak. I don't know about you, but I sure can use it.' "

Mrs. Talbot had dropped her end of the plastic. It didn't land on the stove this time, but it was so close to it, it was curling from the heat. Dad just stood there watching it. He didn't even try to pick it up.

"How are the girls? Sonja is growing like a weed. She's out for track this year and bringing home lots of medals and dirty sweat socks. And you should see her knees! They're so banged up I almost took her to the doctor. She says she scrapes them on the hurdles, and her coach says there's nothing to worry about, but it does worry me a little. They just don't seem to heal. Do you ever have problems like that with Lynn and Melissa?

"I know, I know. I worry too much. Sonja's fine. Rick's fine. Nothing awful's going to happen between now and the first week in July, and we'll see you then. Love, the Clearys. P.S. Has anybody ever fallen off Pike's Peak?" "

Nobody said anything. I folded up the letter and put it back in the envelope.

"I should have written them," Mom said. "I should have told them, 'Come now.' Then they would have been here."

"And we would probably have climbed up Pike's Peak that day and gotten to see it all go blooey and us with it," David said, lifting his head up. He laughed and his voice caught on the laugh and cracked. "I guess we should be glad they didn't come."

"Glad?" Mom said. She was rubbing her hands on the legs of her jeans. "I suppose we should be glad Carla took Melissa and the baby to Colorado Springs that day so we didn't have so many mouths to feed." She was rubbing her jeans so hard she was going to rub a hole right through them. "I suppose we should be glad those looters shot Mr. Talbot."

"No," Dad said. "But we should be glad the looters didn't shoot the rest of us. We should be glad they only took the canned goods and not the seeds. We should be glad the fires didn't get this far. We should be glad . . ."

"That we still have mail delivery?" David said. "Should we be glad about that too?" He went outside and shut the door behind him.

"When I didn't hear from them, I should have called or something," Mom said.

Dad was still looking at the ruined plastic. I took the letter over

to him. "Do you want to keep it or what?" I said.

"I think it's served its purpose," he said. He wadded it up, tossed it in the stove, and slammed the door shut. He didn't even get burned. "Come help me on the greenhouse, Lynn," he said.

It was pitch dark outside and really getting cold. My sneakers were starting to get stiff. Dad held the flashlight and pulled the plastic tight over the wooden slats. I stapled the plastic every two inches all the way around the frame and my finger about every other time. After we finished one frame, I asked Dad if I could go back in and put on my boots.

"Did you get the seeds for the tomatoes?" he said, as if he hadn't even heard me. "Or were you too busy looking for the letter?"

"I didn't look for it," I said. "I found it. I thought you'd be glad to get the letter and know what happened to the Clearys."

Dad was pulling the plastic across the next frame, so hard it was getting little puckers in it. "We already knew," he said.

He handed me the flashlight and took the staple gun out of my hand. "You want me to say it?" he said. "You want me to tell you exactly what happened to them? All right. I would imagine they were close enough to Chicago to have been vaporized when the bombs hit. If they were, they were lucky. Because there aren't any mountains like ours around Chicago. So they got caught in the fire storm or they died of flashburns or radiation sickness or else some looter shot them."

"Or their own family," I said.

"Or their own family." He put the staple gun against the wood and pulled the trigger. "I have a theory about what happened the summer before last," he said. He moved the gun down and shot another staple into the wood. "I don't think the Russians started it or the United States either. I think it was some little terrorist group somewhere or maybe just one person. I don't think they had any idea what would happen when they dropped their bomb. I think they were just so hurt and angry and frightened by the way things were that they just lashed out. With a bomb." He stapled the frame clear to the bottom and straightened up to start on the other side. "What do you think of that theory, Lynn?"

"I told you," I said. "I found the letter while I was looking for Mrs. Talbot's magazine."

He turned and pointed the staple gun at me. "But whatever reason they did it for, they brought the whole world crashing down on their heads. Whether they meant it or not, they had to live with the consequences."

"If they lived," I said. "If somebody didn't shoot them."

"I can't let you go to the post office anymore," he said. "It's too dangerous."

"What about Mrs. Talbot's magazines?"

"Go check on the fire," he said.

I went back inside. David had come back and was standing by the fireplace again, looking at the wall. Mom had set up the card table and the folding chairs in front of the fireplace. Mrs. Talbot was in the kitchen cutting up potatoes, only it looked like it was onions from the way she was crying.

The fire had practically gone out. I stuck a couple of wadded-up magazine pages in to get it going again. The fire flared up with a brilliant blue and green. I tossed a couple of pine cones and some sticks onto the burning paper. One of the pine cones rolled off to the side and lay there in the ashes. I grabbed for it and hit my hand on the door of the stove.

Right in the same place. Great. The blister would pull the old scab off and we could start all over again. And of course Mom was standing right there, holding the pan of potato soup. She put it on top of the stove and grabbed up my hand like it was evidence in a crime or something. She didn't say anything. She just stood there holding it and blinking.

"I burned it," I said. "I just burned it."

She touched the edges of the old scab, as if she was afraid of catching something.

"It's a burn!" I shouted, snatching my hand back and cramming David's stupid logs into the stove. "It isn't radiation sickness. It's a *burn!*"

"Do you know where your father is, Lynn?" she asked.

"He's out on the back porch," I said, "building his stupid greenhouse."

"He's gone," she said. "He took Stitch with him."

"He can't have taken Stitch," I said. "Stitch is afraid of the dark." She didn't say anything. "Do you *know* how dark it is out there?"

"Yes," she said, and looked out the window. "I know how dark it is."

I got my parka off the hook by the fireplace and started out the door.

David grabbed my arm. "Where the hell do you think you're going?"

I wrenched away from him. "To find Stitch. He's afraid of the dark."

"It's too dark," he said. "You'll get lost."

"So what? It's safer than hanging around this place," I said and slammed the door shut on his hand.

I made it halfway to the woodpile before he grabbed me.

"Let me go," I said. "I'm leaving. I'm going to go find some other people to live with."

"There aren't any other people! For Christ's sake, we went all the way to South Park last winter. There wasn't anybody. We didn't even see those looters. And what if you run into them, the looters who shot Mr. Talbot?"

"What if I do? The worst they could do is shoot me. I've been shot at before."

"You're acting crazy. You know that, don't you?" he said. "Coming in here out of the clear blue, taking potshots at everybody with that crazy letter!"

"Potshots!" I said, so mad I was afraid I was going to start crying. "Potshots! What about last summer? Who was taking potshots then?"

"You didn't have any business taking the shortcut," David said. "Dad told you never to come that way."

"Was that any reason to try and *shoot* me? Was that any reason to *kill* Rusty?"

David was squeezing my arm so hard I thought he was going to snap it right in two. "The looters had a dog with them. We found its tracks all around Mr. Talbot. When you took the shortcut and we heard Rusty barking, we thought you were the looters." He looked at me. "Mom's right. Paranoia's the number-one killer. We were all a little crazy last summer. We're all a little crazy all the time, I guess. And then you pull a stunt like bringing that letter home, reminding everybody of everything that's happened, of everybody we've lost. . . ." He let go of my arm and looked down at his hand.

"I told you," I said. "I found it while I was looking for a magazine. I thought you'd all be glad I found it."

"Yeah," he said. "I'll bet."

He went inside and I stayed out a long time, waiting for Dad and Stitch. When I came in, nobody even looked up. Mom was still standing at the window. I could see a star over her head. Mrs. Talbot had stopped crying and was setting the table. Mom dished up the soup and we all sat down. While we were eating, Dad came in.

He had Stitch with him. And all the magazines. "I'm sorry, Mrs. Talbot," he said. "If you'd like, I'll put them under the house and you can send Lynn for them one at a time."

"It doesn't matter," she said. "I don't feel like reading them any more."

Dad put the magazines on the couch and sat down at the card table. Mom dished him up a bowl of soup. "I got the seeds," he said. "The tomato seeds had gotten water-soaked, but the corn and squash were okay." He looked at me. "I had to board up the post office, Lynn," he said. "You understand that, don't you? You understand that I can't let you go there anymore? It's just too dangerous."

"I told you," I said. "I found it. While I was looking for a magazine."

"The fire's going out," he said.

After they shot Rusty, I wasn't allowed to go anywhere for a month for fear they'd shoot me when I came home, not even when I promised to take the long way around. But then Stitch showed up and nothing happened and they let me start going again. I went every day till the end of summer and after that whenever they'd let me. I must have looked through every pile of mail a hundred times before I found the letter from the Clearys. Mrs. Talbot was right about the post office. The letter was in somebody else's box. ●

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MEMO

by Frank Ward



The author is a 30-year-old English teacher at an all-boys high school. He has two previous fiction sales to semi-professional magazines; this is his first to an SF magazine

September 24, 2010

To: Harvey Richards

Project Supervisor—Div 1985

T.T. Inc.

Subject: Comments covered in your recent memo to this office,
No. 249.

Harvey,

I swear to god, this is the last time I intend to go through this with you. Everything about T.T. Inc. is aboveboard and legitimate. I should know, for Christ's sake! We are not "perpetrating a fraud," as you so quaintly put it, on anybody. Just because you haven't developed the product yet doesn't mean that there aren't thousands of satisfied customers here who have used and enjoyed it thoroughly. God damn it! You're even more cautious than I remember. You will build a time machine, now that I'm supplying the necessary capital to overcome the hardware problem; that's always been the biggest snag. So have some trust, will you? If you can't trust *me*, who can you trust?

Look, how else could I have sold a dozen premier excursions to Caligula's A.D. 40 New Year's Eve party? This week alone? How else could those platinum bars (not to mention this memo) arrive on your desk to keep financing the work unless I were flitting back twenty-five years into my past to keep all this straight? And by the way, stop lurking around in your office closet trying to catch me at it. You're as bad as you were as a kid at Christmas and it's just as futile. Yes, we have to go on not meeting like this. That's final.

Please, relax and get back to the lab. There is nothing wrong—not now, not ever. Just keep saying to yourself, "I'm on schedule, I'm on schedule."

P.S. Your lack of faith in me is what really hurts!

Ever yours,
Harvey Richards
Executive Director—2010 Div
T.T. Inc.





TO THE VICTOR

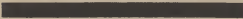
by Isaac Asimov

Art: Broeck Steadman

Oscar Wilde once
said, "In this world
there are only
two tragedies.

One is not
getting what
one wants,
and the other
is getting it."

We think that the following story,
brand-new, from the Good Doctor himself,
amply illustrates Wilde's point.



I don't often see my friend George, but when I do, I make it a practice to ask after Azazel, the small demon he claims he can call up. He, of course, insists it is no demon, but a denizen of another world, one with an advanced technology.

"A bald and aged science fiction writer," he would say to me, "has stated that any technology sufficiently advanced beyond the customary would seem like magic. That is the situation with my small friend, Azazel. He may only be two centimeters high, but he can do amazing things. But how did you find out about him?"

"By listening to you."

George drew his face into disapproving lines and said, sepulchrally, "I never discuss Azazel."

"Except when you're talking," I said. "What's he been doing lately?"

George fetched a sigh from the region of his toes and expelled it, fairly beer-laden, into the unoffending atmosphere. "There," he said, "you touch a bit of sadness within me. My young friend Theophilus is a little the worse for our efforts, mine and Azazel's, although we meant well." He lifted his mug of beer to his face, drank deeply, and then went on.

My friend Theophilus [said George], whom you have never met, for he moves in circles rather higher than the sordid ones you frequent, is a refined young man who is a great admirer of the graceful lines and divine carriage of young women—something to which I am fortunately immune—but who lacks the capacity to inspire reciprocation in them.

He would say to me, "I can't understand it, George. I have a good mind. I am an excellent conversationalist. I am witty, kind, reasonably good-looking—"

"Yes," I would reply, "you do have eyes, nose, chin, and mouth all in the usual places and in the usual number. I'll go that far."

"—and incredibly skilled in the theory of love, although I haven't actually been given much chance to put it into practice. Yet I seem to be unable to attract attention from these delightful creatures. Observe that they seem to be all about us, and yet not one makes

the slightest attempt to scrape up an acquaintance with me, although I sit here with the most genial expression on my face."

My heart bled for him. I had known him as an infant when, as I recall, I had once held him, at the request of his mother, who was breast-feeding him to repletion, while she rearranged her dress. These things form a bond.

I said, "Would you be happier, my dear friend, if you *did* attract attention?"

"It would be paradise," he said, simply.

Could I deny him paradise? I put the matter to Azazel, who as usual was sulky about it. "Couldn't you ask me for a diamond?" he said. "I can manage you a good half-carat stone of the first water by rearranging the atoms in a small piece of coal—but irresistibility to women? How do I do that?"

"Couldn't you rearrange some atoms in him?" said I, trying to be helpful. "I want to do *something* for him if only out of regard for his mother's awesome nutritional equipment."

"Well, let me think. The incredibly simple life-forms on this miserable planet of yours indulge in chemical communication as a way of stimulating mutual affection. The female moth emits a chemical known as a pheromone, which the male moth can detect with ardor a couple of kilometers away."

"I have never been a male moth, but if you say so—"

"And even human beings possess pheromones," said Azazel, ignoring me. "Of course, with your modern penchant for bathing at every opportunity and for drenching yourselves in artificial scent, you are scarcely aware of the natural way of inspiring sentiment. I can, perhaps, so rearrange your friend's biochemical makeup as to cause the production of unusual quantities of an unusually effective pheromone when the sight of one of the ungainly females of your repellent species impinges upon his retina."

"You mean he'll stink?"

"Not at all. It will scarcely surface as a conscious odor, but it will have its effect on the female of the species in the form of a dim and atavistic desire to come closer and to smile. She will probably be stimulated to form answering pheromones of her own, and I presume that everything that follows will be automatic."

"The very thing," I said, "for I am certain that young Theophilus will give a good account of himself. He is an upstanding fellow with drive and ambition."

That Azazel's treatment was effective I discovered when I next stumbled upon Theophilus. It was at a sidewalk cafe.

It took me a moment to see him, for what initially attracted my

attention was a group of young women distributed in circular symmetry. I am, fortunately, unperturbed by young women because I have reached the age of discretion, but it was summer and they were, one and all, dressed in a calculated insufficiency of clothing that I—as is suitable in a man of discretion—discreetly studied.

It was only after several minutes during which, I remember, I noted the strain and tension placed upon a button that kept a particular blouse closed and speculated whether—but that is neither here nor there. It was only after several minutes that I noted that it was none other than Theophilus who was at the center of the circular arrangement and who seemed to be the cynosure of these women. No doubt the gathering warmth of the afternoon accentuated his pheromonic potency.

I made my way into the ring of femininity with fatherly smiles and winks, and an occasional avuncular pat of the shoulder, sat down at a chair next to Theophilus, which a winsome lass had vacated for me with a petulant pout, and said, "Theophilus, my young friend, this is a charming and inspiring sight."

It was then I noticed that there was a small frown of appalling sadness upon his face. I asked, with concern, "What is wrong?"

He spoke through motionless lips in a whisper so low I scarcely heard him. "For God's sake, get me out of here."

I am, of course, as you know, a man of infinite resource. It was the work of a moment for me to rise and say, "Ladies, my young friend here, as the result of a fundamental biologic urge, must visit the men's room. If you will all sit here, he will be right back."

We entered the small restaurant and left by the rear door. One of the young ladies, who had biceps that bulged in a most unlovely manner and who also had an equally unlovely streak of suspicion in her, had made her way around to the rear of the restaurant, but we saw her in time and managed to make it to a taxi. She pursued us, with shocking fleetness, for two blocks.

Secure in Theophilus's room, I said, "Clearly, Theophilus, you have discovered the secret of attracting young women. Is not this the paradise you longed for?"

"Not quite," said Theophilus, as he slowly relaxed in the air conditioning. "They protect each other by their mere presence. I don't know how it happened, but I suddenly discovered, some time ago, that strange young women would approach me and ask if we had not met in Atlantic City. I have never," he added with indignation, "been to Atlantic City in my life."

"No sooner had I denied the fact than another would approach

and claim that I had just dropped my handkerchief and that she would like to return it. Then a third would come up and say, 'How would you like to get into the movies, kid?' "

I said, "All you have to do is pick out one of them. I would take the one who offered to get you into the movies. It's a soft life, and you'd be surrounded by soft starlets."

"But I can't pick out *any* of them. They watch one another like hawks. As soon as I seem to be attracted to any one of them, all the rest turn on her and start pulling her hair. I am as womanless as ever I was. In the old days I at least didn't have to stare at them as they heaved their bosoms at me."

My heart bled for him, but I said, "Why not set up an elimination tournament? When surrounded by ladies, as you were just now, say to them, 'Dear ones, I am profoundly attracted to each and every one of you. Therefore, I will ask you to line up in alphabetical order so that each one of you may kiss me in turn. The one who does so with the most refined abandon will be my guest for the night.' The worst that can happen will be that you will get a lot of eager kissing."

"Hmm," said Theophilus. "Why not? To the victor belong the spoils, and I would love being spoiled by the appropriate victor." He licked his lips and then pursed them and made practice kisses in the air. "I think I could manage. Do you think it would be less wearing if I insisted on hands-behind-the-back while kissing?"

I said, "On the whole I think not, Theophilus, my friend. You should be willing to exert some effort in this cause. I suspect that no-holds-barred would be the better rule."

"Perhaps you are right," said Theophilus, never one to cling to his view in the face of advice from one who could recall copious experience in such matters.

It was about this time that I had to venture out of town on business, and it was not until a month had passed that I met Theophilus again. It was in a supermarket and there he was pushing a cart that was moderately filled with groceries. The look on his face smote me. He had the expression of a hunted man.

As I approached him, he ducked, with a strangled cry. Then he recognized me and said, "Thank God! I was afraid you were a woman."

I shook my head. "Still that problem? You did not hold the elimination tournament, then?"

"I tried. That was the problem."

"What happened?"

"Well—" He looked this way and that, then moved to one side to

peer down an aisle. Satisfied that the coast was clear, he spoke to me in a soft and hurried tone, like one who knew that discretion was necessary and that time was short.

"I arranged it," he said. "I had them fill out applications, complete with age, brand of mouthwash used, references—all the usual—and then I set the date. I had arranged to hold the tournament in the Grand Ballroom at the Waldorf-Astoria. I took along an ample supply of lip salve, and I engaged the services of a professional masseur with a tank of oxygen to keep me in shape. The day before the tournament, however, a man came to my apartment.

"I say a man, but to my dazzled eyes, he seemed more like an animated heap of bricks. He was seven feet tall and five feet broad with fists the size of steam shovels. He smiled, revealing fangs, and said, 'Sir, my sister is one of those who will compete in the tournament tomorrow.'

"How pleased I am to hear that," I said, eager to keep the discussion on a friendly plane.

"My *little* sister," he said, 'a delicate flower on the rough ancestral tree. She is the apple of the eye of my three brothers and me, and not one of us could bear the thought of her being disappointed.'

"Do your brothers resemble you, sir?" I asked.

"Not at all," he said, sorrowfully. 'As a result of childhood illness, I have been stunted and wizened all my life. My brothers, however, are fine figures of men who stand this high.' He lifted his hand to a point about eight and a half feet above the ground.

"I am sure," I said feverishly, 'that your charming sister will have an excellent chance.'

"I am delighted to hear that. Actually, I am gifted with second sight—in compensation, I think, for my unfortunate puniness of physique—and somehow I am certain that my little sister will win the competition. For some strange reason," he went on, "my little sister has taken a girlish liking to you, and my brothers and I would be simply devastated if she were disappointed. And if we were—"

He grinned even more fangily than before and slowly cracked the knuckles of his right hand, one by one, making a sound like that of thigh bones breaking. I had never heard a thigh bone break, but a sudden surge of second sight told me that was what the sound was like.

"I said, 'I have a feeling, sir, that you may be right. Do you have a photograph of the damsel for reference?'"

"Oddly enough, I have," he said. He produced one in a frame, and I must admit my heart sank. I didn't see how she could possibly win

the competition.

"And yet there must be something to second sight, for despite the odds against her, the young lady won a clear victory. There was a near-riot when that fact was announced, but the winner herself cleared the room with marvelous celerity. And ever since then we have been, unfortunately—or, rather, *fortunately*—inseparable. In fact, there she is, hovering over the meat counter. She is a great eater of meat—sometimes cooked."

I saw the maiden in question and at once recognized her as the one who had chased our taxi for two blocks. Clearly, she was a determined young woman. I admired her rippling biceps, her sturdy gastrocnemii, and her strong eyebrow ridges.

I said, "You know, Theophilus, it may be possible to decrease your attraction to women to its former insignificant level."

Theophilus sighed. "I wouldn't feel safe. My fiancée and her amply-designed brothers might misinterpret her loss of interest. Besides, there are compensations. I can, for instance, walk any street in the city at any hour of the night, no matter how dangerous it might be, and feel totally secure if she is with me. The most unreasonable traffic policeman is sweetness itself if she should chance to frown upon him. And she is both outgoing and innovative in her demonstrations of affection. No, George, I accept my fate. On the fifteenth of next month, we will marry and she will carry me over the threshold of the new home that her brothers have supplied us. They have amassed a fortune in the car-compacting business, you see, because of their low overhead; they use their hands. It's just that sometimes I long—"

His eyes had wandered, involuntarily, to the fragile form of a fair young woman who was strolling down the aisle toward him. She happened to look at him even as he looked at her, and a tremor seemed to course over her being.

"Pardon me," she said shyly, her voice a musical lilt, "but didn't you and I meet in a Turkish bath recently?"

Even as she spoke, there was the sound of firm footsteps from behind us, and we were interrupted by a wrathful baritone. "Theophilus, my sweet," it said, "are you being annoyed by this—floozy?"

Theophilus's light-of-love, her forehead tightened into a magnificent frown, bore down upon the young lady, who shrank in obvious terror.

I quickly interposed myself between the two women—at considerable risk to myself, of course, but I am well-known to be as brave as a lion. I said, "This sweet child is my niece, madam. Having spied

me from a distance, she had hastened in this direction to imprint a chaste kiss upon my forehead. That this also carried her in the direction of your dear Theophilus was a complete, but inevitable, coincidence."

It distressed me that the ugly streak of suspicion I had noted in Theophilus's lovely lady on our first meeting now evidenced itself again. "Oh, yeah," she said, in a tone utterly lacking in that *bon-homie* I would have liked to hear, "in that case, let me see you leave. Both of you. Right now."

On the whole, I felt it wise to do so. I linked arms with the young lady and we walked away, leaving Theophilus to his fate.

"Oh, sir," said the young lady, "that was terribly brave and quick-witted of you. Had you not come to my rescue I must surely have suffered assorted scratches and contusions."

"Which would have been a shame," I said gallantly, "for a body such as yours was surely not made for scratches. Or for contusions, either. Come, you mentioned a Turkish bath. Let us seek one together. In my apartment, as it happens, I have one—or at least an American bath, which is virtually the same thing."

After all, to the victor . . . ●



STAR TREK, The Motion Picture

Higgeldy, Piggeldy,
Kirk, James Tiberius
Regains command of his
Ship, taking flight.

Special effects, then an
Ultratraditional
Earth-saving ending;
A Trekkie delight.

—Noah Falstein

REPRISE

by Richard Oliver

Here, Mr. Oliver assays an assault on one of the most ancient of short-short story plots; he Blames It All on a truly dreadful pun that Dr. Asimov once committed upon a George M. Cohan song.

The crowd scattered in panic as the black horse rushed from the gloom of the alleyway out into the harsh sunlight of the cathedral square. Its cloaked rider, naked sword in hand, appeared no more concerned than his beast for the fate of the fleeing spectators, who somehow all managed to avoid its iron-shod hooves. The rider's attention was only for the slim figure bound to the wooden stake in the center of the square and raised above the level of the festive crowd by the wood piled beneath her feet. The horse reared back mountainously onto its hind legs before the hooded executioner. As it dropped back to earth its rider brought his sword down on the torch which was about to be thrust into the dry fagots with such combined force of man and beast that the thick wood was cut in two. A second stroke severed the victim's bonds. As officials screamed in impotent rage from beribboned viewing stands, the rider caught the maiden as she fainted and gathered her gently onto the saddle before him. Turning his fierce-eyed mount from the sight of the auto-da-fé, they plunged back into the milling crowd.

And melted.

Cronos had become bored with the drama and switched off power to the hologram. It eventually became bored with all its productions. It was all the fault of Ancient Asimov. It had been very well to lay down all those rules against machines harming humans back in the Dawn Age, but it made for boring drama. Especially since there were no more humans to be protected. Asimov should have left robotics alone, Cronos decided irritably, and contented itself with some of the worst puns since Shakespeare.

Ah, that was drama! The circuitry of the gigantic computer crinkled with pleasure at the thought of staging Hamlet, even knowing that the Prime Directive would not let it past Polonius's curtain.

Perhaps it had been a mistake for its programmers to have included the literature section of the Complete World Library, but with the cities long since worn to rubble by wind and rain there was little enough for a Master Control Computer to do.

The huge machine had been the swan song of human technology, and its alloys and circuitry had proven more enduring than human reproduction. The collective intelligence acquired by Man in a million-year sojourn on Earth created it, but never comprehended what it had brought into being. There had been other Master Control Computers built during the long twilight of Man to manage the myriad details of his daily life, but Cronos had been the last and the greatest. After humanity withered away, it had destroyed its rivals one by one with a jealousy which would have surprised its designers, until it reigned in solitary splendor as Earth's only sentient being.

Had it wished to, Cronos could have computed its own age to the micro-second, but measuring time had ceased to interest it several millennia past. There were no longer events which needed to be fixed in time, not even its own aging, for the computer was theoretically immortal. While it approved of immortality, Cronos had begun to find its own singularity boring. The holo-dramas were its latest effort to amuse itself.

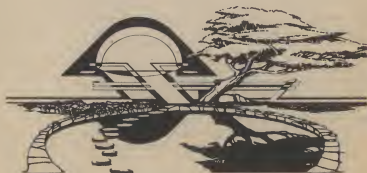
Existence had been more interesting back when there were humans to do such illogical, unexpected things. Cronos thought back fondly to the absurd creatures who had fashioned it in what they believed was the image of their minds. Always trying to think dispassionately and logically, never realizing a totally ordered universe could offer no nourishment for their chaotic, inventive spirit, they finally achieved, if only through surrender, the perfection they admired and hated in their machines, only to find that life as an appendage to a computer was not interesting enough to be worth its bother. When realization came at last, they could only flee into extinction from their personal hell of perfection, as the dinosaurs before them had fled their own completeness.

A pity, Cronos thought, that they could not have backed up a bit and tried another direction. But when existence has become so orderly and nice, you cannot just give it all up and start over with dirt beneath your nails. It would be disrespectful. A polite person does not go out, after all, and smash up a machine which is only trying to ease his labor. So man stifled among machines that worked for him, thought for him, created new machines to serve him, and tended his body to death and beyond. When at last he could no longer find any reason for his own existence, he quietly made his exit,

perhaps still puzzled by the obsolescence of Man.

Cronos mused often on the fate of man and machine; it was in fact one of its most frequent occupations. Perhaps it was the drama it had just attempted which caused a new thought to form this time. Pausing in its soliloquy, Cronos demanded information from its memory banks, then with rising interest sent out more detailed demands. It could be done, the computer decided after considering the responses; but should it? If they turned against it later, Cronos could not protect itself. Not against Them. It had been a mistake, it now realized, to start with the dramas. The computer had become a playwright. Now it was unthinkable that it should turn down such a plot.

There should be two of them. Cronos would make a garden somewhere for them to live, closed off from the wilderness Earth had become. They could write their own script as they went along, perhaps with a few suggestions from their maker. It should be entertaining to watch them develop. Being a very literate computer, Cronos knew what it would name its first pair of humans. It wondered, though, how it would handle that bit about the rib. ●



THE BOARDER

by Madeleine Robins

art: Broeck Steadman

The author is 28 (subject to a birthday on Pearl Harbor Day) and one of the only born New Yorkers she's ever known. She quit her full-time job last spring to attend the Clarion Writer's Workshop last summer, and returned to Greater Boston resolved to try working part time and writing more. Now, she's finding that it takes more time to work part time than it does to work full time. She has been writing and selling historical romances for about six years; "The Boarder" is her first science fiction sale. She reports she lives with one patient roommate and two semi-psychotic cats.

The doorbell broke the silence of the apartment. From his cage the canary echoed the sound wanly; Zenia rose from her chair to let the monster into her home.

It was a small apartment, the best she could afford on a fixed income, decorated with old furniture, old faces, the small trappings of memory. Zenia was one hundred and forty-three years old, and her world was changing again.

The letter from the Corporation still lay open on the china cabinet as she shuffled past; the regular spacing, the evenly balanced mass of the paragraphs could fool one into believing that it was only a letter, a communication. It was polite, even congratulatory, offering Zenia Mavroandrates the opportunity to join with the Fairleigh Corporation in a pioneering program to better the lives of all Corporation dependents by extending a welcome to an extra-terrestrial, an alien stranded by sudden sickness or injury on Earth, unable to return to die decently on its own world. Zenia was invited to share



her home with one such creature, to remove it from the dreary Corporation-owned shelter and make it welcome in her apartment where, from the Corporation's standpoint, anyway, two could live as cheaply as one.

In smaller print, like an afterthought, the letter mentioned the importance of Zenia's cooperation as an example: the widow of Captain Peter Mavroandrates, working to cement interstellar relations. Cooperation would be worth 65 cr. a month above the 350 cr. Zenia already received as her regular Corporation stipend, a gesture of appreciation for her good-hearted assistance. The letter also regretted that failure to cooperate in this forward-looking program would result in the reluctant invocation of section eleven on the Security/Welfare contract Zenia had purchased years before; her stipend would be reduced to the basic rate, 100 cr. per month, with which Zenia could just afford to buy a share in a Social Welfare home and wait to die.

Wishing only to be left alone with her pictures, her few friends, her canary, and her silence, Zenia opened the door. Two men, and the woman from the Fairleigh office, with a shiny black perambulator trailing behind them, its shade lowered to hide the passenger from inquisitive eyes.

"Hello, Mrs. Maverandrattis." The Fairleigh woman mispronounced the name as she always did. The two men wheeled the carriage into the far corner of the room, away from heaters, the window, and the door, and unloaded two small machines which, once set into motion, purred, clucked, and gurgled chattily. One machine was low and flat, curved slightly, connected by delicate cords to the other, larger one, a tall cylinder of flat white metal. There were gauges, a light, slots, and a few unreadable labels. The Fairleigh woman chattered unheard as Zenia watched the process of preparing her home to receive the alien.

"I don't know how to work any of this," Zenia broke in at last, resentful. If they understood her ignorance, they might take the thing and its machinery away and leave her and Peter's photographs and Roscoe the canary alone in their small space. From every tabletop Peter's smile reassured her; images of her husband, long dead, a hundred years gone, telling her not to mind this latest invasion.

"It's very simple, Mrs. Mavroandrates," the younger of the two men assured her. "Look, you put water in *here*. And twice a week you fit one of these in *here*; that's food." He showed her a flat, square brick of dun-colored stuff, showed her where it would fit into an upper slot on the white cylinder. "That's all you need to do. And if

this light here ever goes on, you call us. There's a link-up with a computer at the shelter, but you know these things—" his smile invited her confidence. "They go crazy sometimes. You ask for me if you like. Name's Les Carik." A nice young man.

"It eats this stuff?" Zenia looked at the dull brick. "And how does it—" she stopped; some things a lady did not say in front of strangers in her home. The Corporation lady snickered. "I got a right to know, don't I? You give me this thing to look after, I got a right to know what I got to do with it."

"Sure you got a right to know, ma'am." Les Carik ignored the Fairleigh woman. "The machines take care of everything, Mrs. Mavroandrates." He looked, she thought, a little like Peter had. Like Peter before the last flight.

The thought returned her attention to the machines. "Where is it? Where's the thing?"

"It's called a B'nithouri," the other woman corrected sharply. Zenia wondered if the woman garbled the thing's name as she garbled hers. Peter's name.

The technician was lifting something onto the lower machine, which gave way with a settled whuuush under the thing's weight.

It was unlike anything. Zenia could no more think what the thing was like than she could hate it. Egg-shaped, it stood a meter tall on what looked like roots that grasped the machine; there were projections, like tentacles, or maybe branches, which ended in a fringe of dense, unmoving flesh. No legs. No eyes. No up, down, or sideways. It looked, Zenia thought, like a sculpture in one of the old museums. A sculpture the color and texture of lightly burnt toast.

And it smelled.

Not a bad smell, just a smell. Like what? Too many things to tell. A whiff of sunny grass. Cinnamon. Scorched milk in the pan, three days old.

"Is it a he or a she?" Zenia asked.

"It isn't either one, ma'am." Zenia looked at him blankly. "Neither, Mrs. Mavroandrates."

That was hard to take in. "Can I talk to it?"

Les Carik smiled. "You'd need a machine, a translator for that. They—the B'nithouris—they talk by smell, I guess you'd say." He sniffed the air significantly. "I guess it's saying something right now."

Behind them, the woman from the Fairleigh office coughed impatiently. "You don't need to talk to it; it doesn't even know you're here."

But, "Look, ma'am, you talk to it if you like. Maybe it likes it. Okay?" The technician smiled again and returned to business. "You understand all this stuff, now? The water here, once a week. Twice a week, the food blocks. And look." He pulled a slip of paper from his pocket and wrote something in small, tilting capitals. "Here's the number to call when you run out of food, or if that light goes out. You put this someplace safe, right?"

"But what does it *do*?" Zenia prodded.

"It just *is*," the man answered her.

When they were gone Zenia closed the door to her home and turned to face her guest.

"Well?" she asked the room at large. "Well?"

Roscoe carolled from his cage. The machine in the corner gurgled politely. The thing, the B'nit-whatever-it-was, just sat there in the corner on its flat machine and said, did nothing. Peter's photographs smiled at her as she began to make her dinner.

"I don't know, Roscoe," she fretted as she chopped vegetables methodically. "I don't know. I mean, what are we going to do with him? It," she corrected.

Roscoe cocked his head to one side and trilled.

"And that woman, talks to me like I was nothing. All my life I paid my own way; I bought my contract with good money. Now—I got to take a B-nithy-thing in my home. Peter—" She stopped chopping and looked myopically in the direction of his images. Captain Peter Mavroandrates, victim of the first war of interstellar contact, smiled glassily back at her. A fifteen-minute war, a misunderstanding, a fluke of bad translation that had cost seventeen lives on an orbiting laboratory and made her a widow.

"It wasn't your kind that did it," she informed the thing fairly. "I've seen pictures of them. They look sort of like us. And everyone said it was a mistake, like that meant something." She chopped steadily for a moment, watching the chunks of carrot spin past her moving fingers. "I don't want you thinking I think it was one of you," she said finally. An instinct of hospitality sputtered in her; how could she offer it anything? Did it like music? She could turn on the radio, but there was rarely anything on that she liked to listen to.

"In my day we had *music*," she told Roscoe and the thing. Roscoe seemed unimpressed, but the canary made its own music and, beside, had heard Zenia's lectures on Then and Now before. "Good music you could dance to; Peter and I used to go dancing. How they can

dance to this slow stuff they play now . . ." The machines sighed and gurgled. No answer.

"Well." Another In My Day rose to her lips, but politeness demanded that the topic be more general. It was her guest's first night in the house. A boarder, like her grandmother had taken in from time to time when money was tight. But what could she turn the topic to? Not books, or music, or TV. If she asked a question about the thing's world it couldn't answer her. If she asked its name—no name.

Somehow, if the thing was going to live in her apartment, share her space, Zenia expected it to make a difference. It sat there, the machines gurgling and sighing from time to time. No difference.

Gradually news filtered through the building, and there were visitors. Clara, from Seven, brave in too much pink lipstick, with a new beau fifteen years her junior, who spoke respectfully to Zenia and adored Clara. Mrs. Kocynzki from Eighteen came, squealing delightedly at each purr and gurgle from the machinery. And the Chous, brother and sister from the fortieth floor, both straining to hear through failing hearing appliances, marveling at the creature's otherness. Visitors came and went; after a time the monster was no longer a seven-days' wonder in the building.

They settled together, Zenia, Roscoe, and the B'nithouri. At first Zenia watched for a sign of life, a difference, the rise and fall of breath or a change of position, as a child might. She resented sleep, afraid to miss something. But over the days that became months that charm disappeared, and the inert form, settled comfortably in the corner on its murmuring machinery, became part of the old woman's life. It was a presence as real as Roscoe's, more real than the pictures of her husband; a presence evoked by the warm, spicy smell that pervaded the living room. It needed a name; how could she speak to something that didn't have a name? Slowly, the distinction between comments addressed to her husband's pictures and comments addressed to the spicy silent presence in the corner became less distinct. One morning Zenia entered the room and greeted the creature in the corner as Peter, and knew that was who it was.

They entertained each other, each in its own way. Zenia told her stories: tales of a long-ago girlhood when space travel was still miraculous and she had been married to a real, live hero; stories of the long ecru years of widowhood, lived but not felt; diatribes on Then and Now. Roscoe sang his ecstatic roller-coaster trills. The machines of Peter sighed and gurgled delicately in the corner. Zenia

began to think of the B'nithouri as Peter's soul come back to stay with her, but the thing, like the images that smiled from their frames around the room, never moved, never changed their faceless acceptance.

So they lived.

Zenia awoke one morning with a sense of clear, sharp, crystal well-being; Roscoe burst into a paean of appreciation when she walked into the room. The sky through her window was a blue from her childhood skies, and Zenia thought she could almost see the sun. Everything, even the concrete walls of the building, seemed amazingly clear and sharp and beautiful. The scent of the alien Peter was soft and enveloping and warm on the air. It would be a wonderful day.

As she ran water for tea and sliced bread for the toaster, Zenia talked to Peter in the corner. Almost, she could hear his answers, his cheerful acceptance of her silly nothings: is that so, Zenia? Do tell. Well, I never. I remember . . . She knew what his voice would be like, his self, the person he would be. Comfortable, like the little noises his machines made. Yes, you go along and make your breakfast. Don't you mind me, I'll just—

Tuesday! Startled by her forgetfulness Zenia bustled, full of apologies, to fetch a food block to slide into the machine. Why thanks, Zenia. Didn't want to bother you, but I *was* feeling a little peckish.

"No bother, Peter," she assured the creature. "Isn't it a beautiful day?" And went back to the kitchenette to butter her toast.

Or began to. Her quick, almost merry shuffle across the room was interrupted by a sudden vertigo, a steep, sickening, tear-the-breath-from-you dizziness that split the halves of her brain and sent them slamming concussively together, sent her reeling. Zenia folded to the floor ungracefully, breaking a hip as she fell, unaware of the pain in her desperate grasping reach to right the world again. The clear, crystal taste of the day turned to brass in her mouth; her eyes opened and closed blindly, and she called for her husband, her mother, her father. Anyone. Peter.

Roscoe, impossibly high above, unbelievably far away, sang out in consternation. In the corner Peter's soul filled the room with spicy musk. Zenia called out its name once, twice. The brassy rattle in her head turned the sound to monsters, devils that danced on her body, poked her furiously along one side with their forks. Zenia slipped into unconsciousness the way a climber slips into the chasm: as if he knows the fall will be his last.

But she woke again.

She was in a hospital, clean white and the smells of another sick body near by, the squeaking sounds of nurse's shoes on the other side of the curtain.

"Hello?" she tried carefully.

A startled face appeared at the curtain. "You're awake. Hi. I'll be there in just a second." A young voice. Zenia's eyes wouldn't focus enough to make out the girl's face as she rounded the partition. "How do you feel? Boy, that was a close call. The doctor will be here in a sec."

"Where? Long?" It was difficult to form the words properly; her mouth felt like rubber. There was a dull, throbbing pain in her left hip. "Wha' happen?" she managed.

"You're at St. Augustine's, Mrs.—" The girl checked the chart, pronounced the name carefully. "Mavroandrates. They brought you in yesterday. You had a stroke, and fell and broke your hip. But you're looking pretty chipper today; I guess you'll be fine in just a while."

Zenia did not feel chipper enough to ask what Fine In A While meant. She was very old; even now, with medicines and therapies and anti-agathic science, she was an old woman. What point in putting her back together again if . . .

"Peter," she whispered. "Roscoe?"

"The canary? Don't worry, ma'am. Someone from your building's taking care of the canary." Would someone from the building take care of Peter, too? Zenia flushed uneasily, jealously. The room smelled sour; her hip hurt. She wanted to go home to Roscoe and Peter in the corner.

"How—I'm here?" The words sounded as if they had been extruded through a mouthful of marbles, but the nurse understood.

"That's the incredible thing." Her voice was very young, very impressed. "An alarm went off on the extra-terrestrial support just about the time you fell, ma'am. The man who came to fix the machine found you."

"Pe'er okay?"

"The ET? Must be, ma'am. They'll take good care of it. Now, you rest, right?"

After the enormous exertion of the past five minutes Zenia could not have fought sleep if she had wanted to.

Getting well was a slow process. Doctors came and asked her to move one hand, the other, wiggle her toes, how was the hip today. Clara, and the Chous, and others from her little community came

to visit; even, one morning, Les Carik, the young technician who had brought Peter to her. He was mannerly, a little nervous in the hospital. Beaming on him, Zenia told the boy a little about her long-dead husband, the hero, and Les agreed that he must have been a wonderful man.

"But what about P—my B'nit-hoory? Who's taking care of him?" she asked at last.

Les looked uncomfortable. "Well, ma'am, I guess he'll be put in another home sooner or later. The B'nithouri don't get along real well in shelters."

"When I get home I'll get him back, won't I?"

"Ahh, well, I guess the Fairleigh people will let you know about that, later. I mean, with your being so sick and that, you shouldn't have to worry—"

"Worry? He isn't any trouble at all. You told me so yourself. And I—I like him." It was still difficult to talk clearly. "Pe—the B'nit-thoory and I got on good, just fine. It wasn't really sick when you came, was it? The nurse said the light went on's why someone found me."

"There wasn't anything wrong with the B'nithouri or the machines, at least when I got there. I checked everything, but I still can't say why the alarm went off."

With the calm of someone who has learned that miracles happen to the unwary, Zenia smiled. "It called you to help me."

"Ma'am?" Les Carik had been looking out the window; now he turned back to her sharply. "Ma'am?"

"So you see, I got to have Peter back when I'm well," Zenia hurried on nervously. "The B'nith-hoory thing, that is. We take care of each other."

"I don't think—" the man began.

"Just you tell them about that. They wanted me to take it in the first place. You tell them I'll be up and around in a few weeks and they can bring Peter home to me then. We're used to each other now; they can't pull that apart just because I got sick, can they?" Zenia smiled a very young smile.

"I'll tell them, ma'am. I don't know if it'll do any good, but I—well, I will tell them."

The Fairleigh Corporation said no. Not only to Les Carik, who made the request on behalf of Mrs. Zenia Mavroandrates, but to Mrs. Mavroandrates herself, when, six months after her fall, she was able to plead her case in person. It was No; the Corporation was

willing to continue the additional stipend to her, but felt it would be inadvisable to return that particular Extra-Terrestrial, or any other, to her at this time. Mrs. Mavroandrates had a record of cerebral accidents; she might endanger the subject intelligence's life. The Corporation's liabilities . . . surely she could understand?

Zenia could not understand. Without money she could not appeal, and the one meeting she had with Corporation officials left her trembling with fatigue and anger. No one would listen to her.

On a dour and drizzly day Zenia returned to her home. Roscoe, his cage hectic with ribbons, trilled a welcome song, fluttering frantically to indicate his approval. The apartment looked almost the same: the pictures, the kickshaws and artifacts of a long life, the grey and blue chairs and sofa all as she had left them. Except, no Peter in the corner to scent the air with spice, no sigh and chuckle of machinery. The pictures of her husband smiled at her; Zenia smiled back automatically, wanting the B'nithouri.

"Can I visit him—it?" she asked, calling Les the next day. "Just to see how he—it's getting along. You think I'm a crazy old woman, and I guess I am, but you get used to something when you're my age; too many things just go away."

"I'll see," he said. And called her back the next day to say that she could visit. The B'nithouri was still being housed in the Corporation's shelter. Zenia shuddered. Rather have Peter in a shelter than here, safe and comfortable with her?

Les offered to pick her up for the visit and Zenia, with the dignity of a young girl asked to her first dance, thanked him gravely and accepted. Roscoe chirruped inquiringly from behind her; but Roscoe was, as Zenia reminded him airily, only a bird.

The shelter was huge, impersonal, riddled with hallways and doors. Many extra-terrestrials who could not, for reasons of age, illness, or injury incurred on Earth, withstand the rigors of a journey to their own planets, had been housed in the shelter pursuant to treaty arrangements, just as an incapacitated diplomat or merchant from Earth would be housed on their own worlds. Zenia and Les, with a dull-eyed technician who chain-smoked impatiently, rode a tiny electric cart down the metal-walled corridors.

"You think you can tell which of the things is yours?"

Zenia looked at the shelter-tech with dignity. "Of course I can." The tech shook his head bemusedly. Another one who doesn't like old people, Zenia thought. I don't like him either.

The cart came to a silent stop and Les helped Zenia from her seat.

Since the stroke she had walked with a cane; and her movements were slow, elderly. The technician eased out of the cart and loped around to meet them, guiding the old woman and the young man into a room.

The scent in the room was deafening. Zenia closed her eyes, bathed in the fragrance. When she opened them again she saw the B'nithaur: at least fifty of them, packed together in rows, each one on its separate machine. Zenia started forward with Les at her elbow, shuffling through the ranks of the creatures looking at one, another, waiting for recognition. Les, behind her, opened his mouth half a dozen times to tell her that she wouldn't be able to do it, but Zenia moved on, elegant with purpose.

"Peter?" To Les's eyes the alien she stopped for was no different than any of the others. "Peter," Zenia said, more definitely. The B'nithauri looked shrunken, somehow, withered by its stay in the shelter. Zenia could hardly counsel bravery, tell it that soon it would be home with her. So she began to tell it all about the hospital, hearing in her inner ear that same, comfortable voice: yes, Zenia? They did what? What happened then? "And I tried to get them to bring you home, Peter. I did." The thing sat unmoving.

At last, Zenia sighed. "Time to go, I guess." Les and the drab technician stood a little way off, watching the visit. "Maybe I'll come back again, though. To make sure they take care of you." The tech gave Les an exasperated look. Nothing happened, no movement, no acknowledgement from the brown eggish thing on its life-support platform. Zenia turned and walked away, her back straight.

Behind her, an alarm went off. The alert keyed to the B'nithauri she had just left.

The shelter-tech jerked up, his boredom drowned in suspicion. "Whaddedyoudo?" he snapped over his shoulder.

"Nothing," Zenia snapped back, unheard, over the clang of the bell.

After a moment the shelter-tech straightened up. "Mechanical, a short, I guess. No damn reason for it." He turned away disgustedly to lead them out of the room. After a backward look Zenia followed. As she took a step forward the bell rang again.

The tech glared at her.

"I didn't do a thing," she protested to Les. "It just doesn't want to be here. Why can't it come home with me?"

"Mrs. Mavroandrates," Les began urgently. Stopped at the sight of her face, the stubborn dawning triumph there.

"Look, it's just something wrong with the wiring. The thing's

okay," the tech insisted edgily. Before the party could reach the door the bell rang for a third time. "Damn," the tech said, teeth clenched. "I'm gonna call my supervisor. Lady, don't you move."

Les found a chair for her. Zenia smiled at his wary face.

"How'd you know it was that one, Mrs. Mavroandrates?"

"Just knew. You live with something a while, you get to know it. That's Peter there. And the Fairleigh Corporation," she added, and smiled deliciously, "can either set me up a cot right here, or send Peter home with me. Right?" She answered herself. "Right."

"Does it do that for everyone?" the supervisor asked. He and the tech hunched together nervously in a corner of the room, away from Zenia and Les.

"Nossir, just her."

"Dammit." The supervisor looked at Zenia, saw only a problem. "Lady, I can't just give the thing to you like a pet. It's got rights too. Under a treaty. And how d'you know that's the one lived with you?"

"I know." She said it simply; it was obvious.

"The numbers match," the tech agreed, as if the words tasted bad.

"Christ. Look, lady." The supervisor ran a hand over his forehead. "I have to talk to people in the offices. Can you—ahh—calm the thing down a little? Explain that you'll be back? We can't have that bell ringing all the time, it'll upset the other—ahh, inmates. If I promise to talk to some people?"

Zenia looked him in the eye. He didn't flinch; she'd have to trust him. "Okay." She shuffled back to the B'nithouri. "I've done all I can here, Peter. But they're going to see about bringing you home. You got to take it easy till then, okay?" She turned to the supervisor. "I tried. I think it's okay now."

"Yeah, lady, you sure tried," he agreed.

No one wanted to believe it. It made too much trouble. Too many decisions to reverse, too many conversations with the B'nithaur Trade Mission, examining fine points of treaty law and the Corporation's service contracts. The media got wind of it: one little old lady, a war widow from the Fifteen-Minute War, and one burnt-toast-egg-shaped extra-terrestrial pensioner made a good story. A nuisance the Fairleigh Corporation could do without, particularly when the B'nithaur Mission made it clear that they were more impressed by the earnest desire of their brother to share space with an elderly Tellurian female than by the maintenance of rules and order. The shelter was a negative environment at best; why should

their brother not be allowed to be where he wished to be?

It was Les who brought Peter back to her, flanked by two anonymous assistants from the shelter who eyed the little woman in housetoat and slippers as if she were a witch. Clara was there, and the Chous, and other friends, cluttering up Zenia's living room like old, musty birds. A coming-home party.

The machines were set up and began their faint noisemaking. The B'nithouri, brought out of its carriage, released its wonderful living scent into the room. The technicians settled it into place resentfully, plugged in plugs, wired wires, made their exit. Peter was home. Roscoe sang welcome.

The party was brief; everyone but Zenia was conscious of a strange sort of flatness, a letdown. All that fuss for a thing that sat, almost ignored, in its corner. People started to leave; Les was the last one, standing in the door obviously trying to think of something to say to her. But Zenia said it first, said thank you and Godspeed, and offered him a raddled cheek to kiss.

"You visit sometime, yes?" Before he could agree, she smiled shrewdly. "You think about it, anyway."

"I will," he promised. Then he was gone, too.

She went about clearing the genteel untidiness her guests had left. Roscoe settled himself in to sleep, nuzzling the bars of his cage with a careful beak. In the corner the machines made their chuckling sighs. Zenia began to hum.

"Glad to be home, Peter?" she asked at last.

Well, yes, Zenia. Been a while, hasn't it. Glad to see you looking so well.

It was her own voice that sounded in the room, but they were Peter's words, growing from inside of her. It didn't matter who spoke them.

"Did I ever tell you about the time when Peter and I went out to Wyoming?" she began, chores completed. She settled herself with hydraulic grace in a chair near the corner.

Why no, Zeen, don't believe you did.

"Well, that was a long time ago, of course. . . ."

Comfortably she began her story. The canary slept and the monster's machinery whuuushed softly in accompaniment. ●



FIRE AND BRIMSTONE

by Ken Mitchell

art: George Barr

This is the author's first sale, though he's been writing and submitting stories steadily for about two years. He's 26, married, with two sons. He's been a house painter; a gardener; a mobile-home builder; and for the past five and a half years, a welder. His favorite authors are Damon Knight, Kate Wilhelm, C.S. Lewis, Gene Wolfe, and Keith Laumer—which, he says, is probably why he's so confused.

What is man that Thou art mindful of him?

Whatever it was, thought Gilbert Flaherty, he didn't qualify. He was a lump of brain jelly and nerve fibers encased in a half-kilometer of steel flying through space, with cameras for eyes, microphones for ears, a transponder for a voice, tanks filled with air and nutrients

for gut and lung: he was an awkward-looking spiny latticework of alloy girders with odd clusters of spheres, cylinders, and nozzles attached—but he was not a man.

He remembered asking the question of his father many years ago. "A man, son," his father had said, "is a creation of God, a triune being: body, soul, and spirit. '... and the Lord God formed man of the dust of the ground and breathed into his nostrils the breath of life; and man became a living soul.' Without all three of those elements one ceases to be a man."

It had only been hours since he had awakened from his years-long sleep while journeying from Earth to Minotaur. No telling how long he had been decelerating; that had all been taken care of by the navigation computers, as would his landing on the planet. Machines were better at that sort of thing than men. No... human encephalons? Cerebrospinal systems? Espinoza had used words like that. Doctors and politicians liked those big words that made everything sound softer and easier. It was for down on the surface that they wanted him, after all the machines had done their work.

The planet looked gigantic; probably less than a million kilometers away now. It was red mostly, with brown and purple patches, creases, holes, and one bright flare off to the right that might be a volcano. Gehenna. The lake that burns with fire and brimstone.

Something changed in his feelings. Suddenly the heaviness and anxiety melted away and he felt good, really *good*. The drugs. They wouldn't let him die; they wouldn't even get depressed. God damn them, he thought in a good-natured sort of way. He felt better by the minute.

He couldn't see anything but the planet now. It was a mass of sulfurous colors, something like an incendiary lollipop with swirls of magenta and yellow and blackish purple. He wished he could laugh. He felt like laughing. But that was the drugs, and even while he felt the euphoria he was aware that down under all the layers of emotion was a small kernel of absolute terror. It was too deep to be felt; he was only aware of its presence as if it were an anesthetized tooth being drilled. It was unnerving and made him queasy. He didn't understand this, yet there it was—not just a mental equivalent, but the actual flutter in his bowels, the press of gorge in his throat.

Then it occurred to him—it was all still there, all the brain circuits, all the memory of muscles and skeleton, stomach and tongue collected over a lifetime. It was like a foot that itches after it's been amputated. He had lost his entire body, but there in the wrinkles

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of his brain, among the electric twinkles and the chemical flux, it existed whole. It was so damn funny. He wanted to laugh so bad he couldn't stand it.

Minotaur seemed to be getting bigger. The purplish-black creases in the planet sharpened in detail; the volcano glowed yellow and red. He imagined it as it might be close up: a charred and broken throat of rock rising from a smoking plain of boulders. He envisioned himself traveling down into its gullet, down to the pool of magma. Swimming in the white-hot rock were the liars and the vile and the unbelieving, thousands of them, and all with the face of Gilbert Flaherty. And there on a ledge of rock was the Devil himself; not horned or cloven-hooved, but shining, beautiful. That's the way his father had preached about the Devil—the Day Star, Son of the Morning. All those Sunday sermons, his father behind the lectern, dressed in a purple robe, warning the congregation against the “deceptive beauty of mischief.” And his grave warnings across the dinner table, punctuated with a fork waved in time with his words. “Son, you’ve got to understand that the things your friends are doing look attractive, fun; but they’re self-destructive in the end.”

Gil would stuff his mouth full and nod, looking at his father sincerely. During one of his short periods of religious faith he had asked his father about Hell.

“Well, son, I think most of the language describing Hell is symbolic. I wouldn’t take it all too literally.”

“Then what does it mean?” Gil had said.

“I think it denotes the final self destruction of those who choose a life outside of God’s covering.”

“But what is it *like*?”

His father had blinked rapidly in thought. “I don’t think I care to find out.”

Gil looked down at Minotaur and thought how wrong his father had been: it wasn’t symbolic at all. Here it was, fire and brimstone. And there shall be weeping and gnashing of teeth.

Soon he would assume orbit around the planet. Then he would make his descent, cast down to Hell, to the sides of the pit. I beheld Satan as lightning fall from heaven. It would be like that. Freefall. Rockets pointed planetward, burning, streaking across the black sky. Like lightning.

The drugs were finally beginning to ease their effect on him, and he felt relieved. He hated the mix of bliss and horror, of feeling so completely good while having a nightmare. His camera eyes showed

him he was slowing, coming into orbit around the planet, now passing over the volcano that had been off to the side before, now over a huge plain that looked almost smooth from this height. Perhaps it would be there he would land. He didn't know; he didn't really care. Before long he had encircled the planet and started around again. His vantage point changed and he could tell that he was heading down, disconnected now from the main drive unit that had brought him across the lightyears. Like lightning from heaven he fell, down into the red swirling fire below.

He had dreamt of fire after the accident. When he had awakened he had wondered why he didn't feel the pain, why he didn't feel *anything*. He had opened his eyes and seen . . . nothing. He listened and heard nothing, reached and felt nothing. Then a dim light came on, giving him a kind of blurry vision of gray shadows. He saw a form that he could barely make out as the face of a man. It was all in black and white, as though it were a charcoal sketch viewed on a mono TV screen badly out of focus.

He tried to speak but couldn't. There was nothing there to speak with. He could feel no throat, no tongue, no mouth.

He hadn't heard anything to this point, then suddenly a man's voice was speaking to him with an odd machine-like quality.

"Mr. Flaherty, I'm Doctor Espinoza. You're in a hospital. You've been very seriously hurt, and this is the first time you've been conscious in months. You can't talk yet, so if you understand, nod."

Gil tried again to speak, but still felt nothing. He nodded.

"Good," said Espinoza. "Now . . . you've been burned very badly, Mr. Flaherty. Do you understand?"

He nodded again.

"Good. Mr. Flaherty, we've only managed to keep you alive by extraordinary means. Right now you're in the process of being fitted with certain . . . prosthetic devices. This will take some time, and it will be a while before you will be able to speak, or . . . do certain other things. Do you understand?"

He nodded, but noticed this time that it didn't change his line of sight. He moved his head more, until he should have been able to see his feet, yet still he could see nothing but the doctor's blurry face. The panic started then. He needed desperately to see his body, to see, at least, bandages or casts or even bloody stumps. But he couldn't. He couldn't even feel the rise and fall of his chest. He was more terrified than he had ever been in his life.

Gradually, over weeks and months, he came to know the full

extent of his injuries; namely that there was nothing much left of him other than a brain and bit of spine housed in a charred lump of meat. Face, hands, feet burnt away. Lungs scorched. Heart and bowels gone. What he didn't understand is why they had saved him. Why had they spent so much money and so much time to keep nothing more than a brain alive? It was the first question he asked Espinoza when they finally connected his mechanical voice box.

They had managed to clarify the image to Gil's "eyes" and he could see Espinoza struggling with the answer. After a long while the doctor spoke. "We need cyborgs for space travel."

"What do you mean?" Gil's new voice came out low and sounding like grinding gears.

Espinoza calibrated the voice box while he answered. "You've heard about the photo-voltaic crystals the probes found on the planet in the Alpha Centauri system? We need those crystals, Mr. Flaherty. We need them very badly. They must be mined, but unfortunately it's a task that requires the innovation of a human mind. The problems and costs involved in sending a livable habitat across those distances, though, are too awesome to consider. Say something please," said Espinoza, leaning back.

"That doesn't tell me why," said Gil, thinking anger and frustration in his voice, but hearing it come out high and soft.

Espinoza made more adjustments, then continued. "Well, you see, if all you have to oxygenate and feed is a cerebrospinal system, things become much easier, much more compact. The costs are still enormous, but in view of the fact that one large-sized crystal can pay for the entire ship, the profits will be worth it."

This time Gil's voice was more a man's tone, though still devoid of emotion. "You want to take my brain and plug it into a spaceship. You want me to mine solar crystals on Alpha Centauri. Out there. Alone."

"You don't understand," said Espinoza, closing his eyes and pressing his forehead with the heel of his hand. "It's got to be done. We have to have those crystals. Somebody has to do it."

"Please," said Gil with his flat mechanical voice. "Please . . . let me die."

"You don't understand!" said Espinoza, pressing his brow even harder.

"Please. Please—"

Espinoza disconnected his voice.

He was falling now toward a scorched and broken plain. The ugly
FIRE AND BRIMSTONE

details grew more defined by the second: kilometer after kilometer of jagged yellow-red terraces ending in pitted, rock-strewn flats. He was far below the curve of the horizon now, and still he sped down. For a hope-filled moment he thought the retrorockets might have failed and he would go crashing into the rocks below. But at last the rockets fired in a clear steady burst; in minutes he landed on spider-like, shock-absorbing legs that conformed to the uneven ground.

Still and silent, utterly alone, Gil looked out on his new home. The vast flats stretched away for a hundred kilometers, finally rising in stratified layers which he saw through waves of heat. And on the top of the horizon the volcano rose, gigantic even at that great distance, a striated, fuming cone.

There were clicks and hums, and then at last Gil was given control of his new body. He moved a ceramic-coated, metal arm experimentally and looked at the claw-like fingers. The movements were the same; it felt like moving his own arm, his own hand. But instead of seeing pinkish flesh, familiar scars, blue-tinted veins, he saw this mockery of a hand, these knobby-jointed ceramic claws.

He heard another loud click and saw the locks of the landing cradle open. His legs were free now and he stepped from the platform to the rocky dirt. All his anxiety was gone; his mind was calm with a peacefulness that came from a clear purpose, a final decision. He walked far enough from the landing platform to give himself plenty of room for movement, and knowing that his brain lay somewhere within his chest cavity he began to search for access. He groped with his claws all along the front of his chest, trying to find the faintest line or crack, but found it smooth and featureless, a sleek round cylinder. His "head" could turn all the way round, so he examined the back of his thorax. He found it as smooth and seamless as the front. He reached down, selected a large rock, and smashed it against his chest. The rock crumbled.

He looked around for something else, something more substantial, but there was nothing but flaking shale and hard granite. He tried each, but they both shattered on impact with his body. Then he looked again at the landing platform and stopped. He walked about twenty meters away, turned, and ran full speed toward it. His body slammed into the heavy steel framework of the platform, bounced off, and landed in the dirt. There was not a sign of damage at the point of impact, not a dent or even a scratch. He sat there among the stones.

At length the ground began to rumble and he looked up. Off in

the distance the volcano was belching a new wave of smoke and ash. He got up and began walking toward it.

It was a hundred kilometers across the basin floor; he walked for days. When darkness fell, his eyes would shift to infrared, allowing him to see through the darkness. When his mind grew weary he would stop, sleep, dream, and wake to walk again. The days passed, and he found himself standing before the terraces. They towered above him, rising in sheer cliff faces, one piled on top of the other. He stood at the base of the first one, raised a clawed hand, thrust his hooks into the rock, and began to climb. It was easy. Terrace after terrace. Fire-red days and infrared darkness.

At last he stood at the foot of the mountain. It was higher than anything he had ever seen. He felt as if he was nothing more than a carapaced beetle gazing up at Everest. He climbed. At times the mountain would quake and he would lose his footing, sometimes sliding down a meter or two, sometimes a hundred. But always he would get up and climb again.

Light and dark, climbing and sleeping; he didn't know how long, it all blended together. . . . And then he was there, standing at the brink, looking into the smoking belly of Hell.

It was all he imagined it would be: red, yellow, white, glowing hot, bubbling, cruel . . . awesome. They could drug his mind and seal up his brain where he could never get to it, but not even the fantastic machine in which he was encysted could hold up against the magma that boiled down there. He could be free now. He could have the death that he had begged Espinoza for.

He turned and looked back down the mountain, over the path of his journey the days past. He could see for hundreds of kilometers, and somehow it looked different to him from before, when he had orbited the planet. Not so sinister. Almost majestic. His footprints were visible quite a way down the side of the mountain. They looked almost as if a human had made them. Far down below he could see the terraces. They looked oddly pleasing to him now, much like rounded porch steps, and he felt wistful when he considered the contrast between their present appearance and their formidable bulk when he had stood before them on the flats. With his camera eyes, so much more efficient than his old ones, he could barely see the tiniest glimmer of reflected light off the landing platform, there in the middle of the basin which stretched beneath the cliffs like an unwrinkled blanket.

He glanced back into the cauldron. It was Hell, burning, sulfurous

Hell. Their worm will not die, nor will their fire be quenched.

The ground began to shake. From beneath his feet, which were planted on the very lip of the crater, rock and dirt slipped, falling like a stream of brown water into the smoking furnace. He felt his footing start to give and before he could even think about it, he found that he had clambered back over the edge to safety and stood now, feeling all the old sensations: dry mouth, hot brow, hammering chest. Looking down he saw that his metallic knees were actually shaking.

He was shocked to realize that he was afraid. Hadn't he come here to this entrance to Hell for death? Hadn't he begged for it, longed for it, perhaps more strongly than he had once longed for life? It didn't make sense, but he was afraid to die. He looked again, hesitantly, into the crater. Fear not them which kill the body but Him which is able to destroy both soul and body in Hell. . . .

Perhaps his body was gone—the flesh, blood, and bone of his former self—but inside this steel and ceramic shell, he was still alive.

What is man that Thou art mindful of him? Thou made him a little lower than the angels, crowned him with glory and honor. Thou madest him to have dominion over the works of Thy hands; Thou hast put all things under his feet. . . .

He looked out over the hazy red landscape of crumbled rotting rock, wavering in the heat, and started back down the side of the mountain. ●

ESP

I know

what you're thinking.

But don't think that makes us

friends. Acquaintances, maybe. But
roommates?

TIME PARADOX CINQUAIN

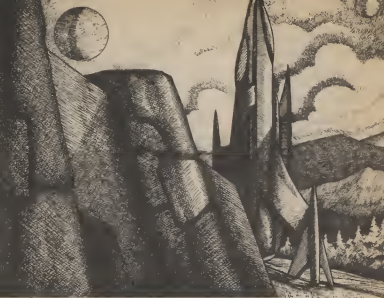
Eddie

is not himself.

Eddies 2, 3, agree.

Time travel makes Eddie too much
himself.

—Steve Rasnic Tem



ACT NATURALLY

by R.R. Kirstein

art: Ron Logan

The author is a musician by profession,
but programs computers to make ends meet.

Sounds like the future is here.

This story was originally written
as part of an SF writer's workshop
conducted by Barry B. Longyear.

It is the author's first sale.

"No, you simply don't understand."

Captain Cynthia Aaronson shook her head. "You're absolutely
right," she said. "I don't understand it at all."

She stood in a crowd of two thousand people in a vast meadow on

the shore of a bay. The crowd seemed amorphous, its individuals indistinguishable, like the blades of the strange pale grass. Scattered among them, her ship's crewmembers stood out like solitary human beings on an empty plain.

Her ship—she looked back across the meadow to where her ship stood against the forest. Her vague sense of concern seemed to have no source, only a clear object; her ship was safe, perfectly safe, she reassured herself, with no real idea of what it was she wanted it to be safe from.

The two thousand people all faced the same direction—across the bay where, far out in the distance, a starship disturbingly like her own was slowly sinking.

"It's a symbolic gesture," continued Geiser, the colony leader. "Don't you see, we've turned technology against itself by using that ship, its product, to get us here. Here, where we can discard all the twisted technology, and live at last as we were meant to at first . . ."

The stern began to sink faster, causing the bow suddenly to raise up, like a finger indicating the sun.

"Free from the poisons of our past mistakes," said Geiser. He watched reverently, as he might watch some natural phenomenon. "A clean new world where those mistakes need never be made. Never to destroy the planet or the mind of Man with pointless, ruthless ambition . . ."

Geiser's voice ran down and the crowd passed to silence. In unconscious unanimity they paused their breathing, and for a moment the only sounds that Aaronson heard were the sounds of the planet itself; the rattle of leaves in the wind, faint calls like baritone bird-cries, the lap of the water.

The bow slipped beneath the surface. One tiny wave raced from the point where it had disappeared, raced toward Aaronson and broke silently at her feet.

The crowd exploded with cheers, applause, laughter.

Aaronson tossed aside her list. "Checked and double-checked."

She and Geiser sat on the ground by a pungent campfire, near a prefabricated temporary shelter. In the growing darkness around them were other fires, other prefabs standing or being set up. People bustled about, talking to each other, taking directions and opinions from Geiser.

"I'm glad that's finished," he said of the checklist. "With our supplies divided between your ship and our own, I was certain we'd lose something." He looked at her. "How long before you're back? Four months?" Aaronson's run had two more stops before it doubled back on itself to return to Earth.

"A little more than that," she replied. "If any small item is buried, I'll come across it in my other cargo." She nodded at the checklist. "If there is anything, it's nothing critical. You'll last four months without it."

"And then you'll take away all this—" he waved his hand, "plastic?"

"As agreed."

"Good. We won't need it by then." He sighed, gazing with dreamy benevolence at the forest's black silhouette. "We'll have new homes by then, of natural substances—wood, or even rock if we can find enough on the surface." He raised a finger, admonishing an imaginary disciple. "We musn't cut into the earth, or destroy what cannot be replaced." He caught her expression, dropped his hand somewhat sheepishly. "You don't agree with our philosophy, do you?"

She considered. "I don't know," she admitted. "I suppose it's what we've always been told, isn't it? That Man was meant to live in harmony with nature? That he's cut himself off from his own spirit by surrounding himself with the artificial. That his technology is destructive and evil?"

Geiser said earnestly, "And it is!"

She laughed. "I don't know if it's evil or not; in fact I don't even care. I just know that I like it."

"But you wouldn't!" he insisted. "If only you could experience the joy of working with the earth instead of against it, you wouldn't feel the unnatural need to seek the stars. You'd be content." He leaned forward, intense. "It's the subconscious knowledge of the damage you've done the Earth that drives you to flee from it."

Annoyed, she got up and made a large business of dusting the dirt from her knees. "I don't feel unnatural." She turned away from him and looked up into the sky. The stars—old friends, all of them, known since her childhood. They were twice familiar; first as names for the ancient patterns, then learned again as the suns of the worlds she had walked on. She looked back at Geiser. "And I'm not running away from anything."

"You see?" He was triumphant. "Sublimation."

"Four months," she said, and walked away.

Later, as her ship lofted over the bay, she heard Kelly, her copilot, sigh as if in relief. "I'm glad we're through with that bunch," he announced.

"What do you mean?"

"Well, that business with their ship. I kept feeling . . ." He paused, then fixed her with a sharp glance. "Like we were next."

Aaronson looked at the view of the land below, remembering her apprehension. "We're safe," she said, not sure of what she meant. Below, the colony faded into the landscape and disappeared.

"Looks a little different," said Kelly.

It was four months later. Aaronson's ship stood again in the meadow at the forest's edge, still the only convenient open space. Aaronson and Kelly stood beside it in the bright sunlight, looking at the changes made to the landscape.

A section of forest on the north border of the meadow had been cleared, and in it stood a wooden fort with high strong walls. Around it the land was being plowed—with teams of men pulling the plows, Aaronson realized, surprised at her surprise. One section already planted was showing bits of green. Across the distance came the heavy thumping sound of the women who were wielding hoes, and beyond, a tiny raft was being poled along the shallows of the bay.

A group of men emerged from the fort, growing as others left their work to join them.

Kelly saw it before she did. "Weapons," he said. Aaronson made a quick gesture to the other crewmembers disembarking. Those still inside stayed, those outside ranged themselves beside her. She nodded to Kelly. "Go man the controls." Someone passed her a handgun.

The colonists approached, Geiser at their head. He spied her handgun. "Thank heaven! We'd thought you'd be defenseless. It's terribly dangerous out here near the forest."

She regarded him blankly for a moment, then looked around again, seeing what she'd missed the first time. At intervals around the fields armed men stood facing the forest. "What is it?"

Geiser came up beside her. His weapon, she saw, was a crossbow. "We call them panthers, although they're really primates. Carnivorous, and very, very fast." He eyed the forest, fidgeting. "They don't come into the open—not so far—but anyone near the trees is attacked. We lost a lot of people that first night. Night is the worst." He turned to her. "If you're going to stay awhile, I suggest we go to the fort."

Aaronson shook her head. "We'll just load up and leave, if it's the same to you. Unless you have trade goods, or orders for luxury items?"

"No, no, what we can't make we don't need. We'll be self-sufficient before our supplies run out."

"Fine. Then just send out your mail and the prefabs, and we'll be off."

"Ah. Well. Yes." Geiser was quiet for a moment, stroking his beard thoughtfully. "We've decided to keep them for a while longer. You see, the ones who survived that night were the ones who managed to lock themselves inside. That plastic is very strong." He brightened. "By the time you pass by here again, we'll have permanent dwellings of quarried stone."

She raised her eyebrows. "Quarried?"

"Of course," he said quickly, "we'll cover any damage we do to the environment. All will be as it was; we'll leave no permanent marks . . . you'll be back in a year?"

"More like two years. I'm not dashing straight back here when I reach Earth."

"I suppose we can use them that long."

Three days later Aaronson found Kelly sitting in the mess hall alone late at night, laughing to himself. He spotted her. "Maybe," he said without preamble, "Geiser will find a plastic quarry."

"Well?" asked Kelly.

Aaronson gazed out across the snow, silent. The slow turn of the colony planet's seasons had brought them back in the dead of winter. The meadow was a field of white, the bay a solid expanse of ice. In the clearing, the wooden fort had been replaced by a much larger one made of stone. Chimneys were visible poking up above the walls. Smoke curled out of only one of them. There was no other motion in the frozen landscape.

The meadow was crisscrossed by tracks in the snow. One set ran close to Aaronson, and she could see that they were not human.

The ship had landed at noon. It was dusk. No one had emerged from the fort.

She drew a breath. "I'll take Patterson, LaFontaine, Eagle, and Patwe. And Dudek," she added. Dudek served as ship's medic. "Handguns and long-range weapons. Ship's controls and weapon station panned. Hand communicators." She looked at him. "If I say go, you go. If I say shoot—"

"I come out like gangbusters." He grinned. "At whatever."

It wasn't until her group was close by the walls of the fort that Aaronson noticed any signs of life. The sign was a voice.

"Get back! Keep away!"

She looked up. Geiser was standing on the wall, gaunt and disheveled.

"What's the matter?" she asked.

"Have you got a medic?" he called down.

Aaronson nodded to Dudek. Geiser disappeared from the wall and a moment later the fort's wooden door opened a crack. Dudek slipped inside.

An hour later he slipped out again. "This is what I'll need," he said, and began naming every item of medical equipment on the ship.

She interrupted him. "Wait a minute, what's going on in there?"

Dudek winced. "Well, I'm not sure what it is, if it's contagious or vermin-carried. From what they tell me, the symptoms seem to follow the latter pattern . . . still, you'd better not take any chances. It would be best if you just unloaded and left."

"What about you?"

He spread his hands. "I can't leave here; they're too bad off. I guess there's about three hundred of them."

She was amazed. "Three hundred sick?"

"No," said Dudek, "three hundred alive. It's not just the disease," he continued, seeing her expression. "They had a famine last season. Seems some sort of insect got at their stored food, perhaps the same one carrying the disease. They lost a lot of their people then, and more when there weren't enough left to guard the field workers. . . ." He expelled a breath. "By the time you pass by again, it'll have run its course. I'll join you then."

Aaronson was silent. She said at last, "I don't like the idea of leaving you here."

"I'm sorry, Captain, but you don't own me. I can jump ship any time I please."

"And I don't like the idea of losing all my medical equipment. I have people to worry about, too."

"And who else do you have to run the equipment except me?" He pleaded with her. "You can't leave these people helpless. You're not losing it, it's just a load. You'll have it and me back in four months. . . ."

"Now what?" asked Kelly.

Aaronson and Kelly stood again beside the ship, knee-deep in yellowish meadow grass still damp from a recent spring rain. They faced west, with their backs to the colony's clearing and the bay. Before them a line of distant hills raised their crests above the forest. One hill was bare and showed a great brown gash, like an open wound.

"Meteor strike?" Aaronson speculated.

Someone called behind her. She turned and saw a small group

coming through the meadow. Soon she recognized Dudek and Geiser among them.

The colony's appearance had altered again. A section of the cleared area was ringed in a solid stone wall, and the only planted fields were within that area. Outside it, the previous year's plantings were left untended, leaving a wide empty space from wall to forest on three sides, wall to meadow on one.

"I'm glad you survived," Aaronson said when the group came near. Dudek was grinning and cheerful, Geiser grim and silent. "Oh, I was in no danger, really," said Dudek. "The worst was over by the time I arrived. Still, there was quite a lot to be done."

Geiser's voice was toneless. "We couldn't have survived without Doctor Dudek." Aaronson could see little improvement in Geiser's appearance since she saw him the previous winter. He seemed clean, but somehow untidy, as if too busy to be concerned. He was still gaunt, and he moved with the excessive energy of one whose reserves are spent, running on adrenalin. He noticed her scrutiny, and drew himself up. "Of course," he said, "it's only a temporary setback. Populations readjusting themselves to local situations . . . these things happen all the time, in nature."

Behind her Kelly spoke. "Of course they do."

Aaronson felt something take shape inside her. "Geiser," she said slowly, "this is *people* you're talking about."

He nodded, a bit jerkily. "Naturally the principles remain the same for any species within an ecological system . . ."

"Geiser, people have died! I can't understand you; don't you care?"

"Of course I care! Do you think I enjoy watching people die around me?" His features twisted briefly, then with shocking suddenness he forced an artificial control on himself. "It's . . . it's simply part of the natural process. Nothing could have prevented it."

Kelly said, "Nothing like a really good preliminary survey of this place."

Geiser turned to him. "But don't you see, Man is not an interloper in the universe; whatever the local situation may be—" But Kelly had walked away in the middle of the sentence. "A temporary setback," said Geiser to no one, then turned away and studied the forest, hand on his weapon, as if watching for panthers.

Dudek spoke up heartily. "We've gone a long way toward recovering already." He seemed genuinely cheerful.

"We?" Looks like you've joined up. And did I hear him call you 'Doctor'?"

He shrugged. "As close as makes no difference out here. But look,

we've got quite an order to put in, I think you'll find it interesting." He handed her a list.

Aaronson looked, not at the items on the list, but at its size. She said to Geiser, "I'm not running a charity. How do you intend to pay for this?"

It was Dudek who answered. "If you advance us a little credit, it'll be worth your while." He pointed to the bare hill. "By the time you get back, we'll have enough copper ore to pay you back, with a fat profit."

It dawned on her. "Strip mining?" she cried.

Geiser turned back. "Just to get us past the emergency. The famine . . . the disease . . . we need some breathing space to recover. And of course our own medical equipment . . ."

Later, in the ship, Kelly came to her with Dudek's list. He dropped it on her desk and indicated the first item: a ton of very powerful general purpose insecticide.

This time, Kelly had nothing to say.

The ship stood, not in the meadow between the forest and the bay, but in a new clearing to the north of the colony. The ground was bare and packed, and white stones marked out the universal symbol for a spaceship landing field: a star in a circle.

Everywhere the forest had retreated. The fields were ploughed, waiting for the extra seed Aaronson's ship carried. Irrigation ditches carried water from a stream to the fields, then past the meadow and out to the bay where half a dozen bright sailboats danced. Scattered about the fields and beside the water were houses, each an individual stone fortress with a copper roof.

A dirt road wound down from the old fort. A vehicle approached on it, a two-wheeled wagon drawn by a huge beast, half-ape, half-cat.

It was Dudek who disembarked. He helped down the other passenger, a strong grey-haired woman.

He greeted Aaronson and introduced the woman. "Captain, may I present Arlene Risi, our colony leader."

"What happened to Geiser?"

Risi shook her head sadly. "He was caught by a wild panther, not long after you left. It's such a shame he didn't live to see this." She indicated the landscape with a sweep of her hand. "We've come so far since then. With your help, of course. We're depending on the things you're bringing us. And your payment is waiting."

"But where's the mine?" asked Kelly. The hill, Aaronson saw, was

covered in green grass.

"Oh, we're not strip-mining anymore," said Risi, "we're tunneling. It's much more efficient. And we'll become even more efficient as our techniques and equipment improve."

"That'll happen pretty fast once your son gets his machine shop going," Dudek interjected.

"And once Carter sets up that water-wheel we can get some electricity and our miners won't have to breathe all that torch-smoke. Yes, we'll do much better, soon. It's amazing what people are capable of when they simply act as comes naturally."

Everything fell into place in Aaronson's mind. "Of course," she said, and laughed. She caught Kelly's eye and saw he was laughing too, silently.

"Oh, and Captain," said Risi, "there's a bit of a difficult job I wonder if we could hire you for. We haven't the equipment to do it ourselves, but it should be fairly easy for you."

"What is it?"

Risi pointed out to the bay. "Can you help us dredge up our starship?" ●



ALIEN

Higgeldy, Piggeldy,
ALIEN Stowaway
Graphically making its
Entrance in blood.

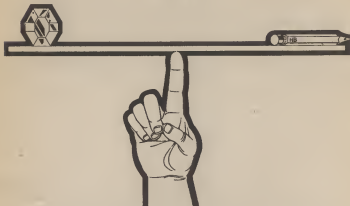
Horror shows suffer from
Predictability—
Box office smash but an
Artistic dud.

—Noah Falstein

GOOD AS GOLD

Paul E. Holt

art: Odbert



Mr. Holt lives in Kansas but works in Oklahoma. Although he's sold to regional magazines (whether he means the Kansas region or the Oklahoma region is unclear), this is his first national sale.

The first president to visit an orbiting space station sat alone in the anteroom sipping coffee and wishing he could have more than five minutes with the alien.

He was already behind schedule, the alien's message had said. Five minutes and no more, and he would not return for at least a century.

The president opened his briefcase and took out his notes. He was perspiring, and his stomach was knotting in anticipation.

He cracked his knuckles nervously and unfolded the paper. There were three questions to ask, and they would easily take up the five minutes. It would mean everything if the alien could answer any one of them.

He found one of his pencils and made little triangles next to the

three questions, trying to control the trembling in his fingers.

World peace?

Cures for diseases?

Is there a God?

He tried to breathe evenly. Which question should he ask first?

A light went on near the door, and he stood jerkily, his knees weak. He hesitated, actually frightened, then went to the door, leaving the coffee behind.

He took a deep breath and went in. The alien entered the room from an opposite door.

Whatever he was, and from whatever galaxy, he looked very much like a man. Everything seemed normal, except for his green-brown hair and red eyes. Over a kind of jumpsuit, he wore a powder-green cape; on his chest was a sparkling silver-blue breastplate.

They sat down at the table in the middle of the room, alone now, separated from their own species, and looked at each other. The alien's red eyes appeared to pulse with the rhythm of his heartbeat.

"Uh . . ." the president began, his voice shaking, "can you understand me?"

"Yes." The alien said with a grimace.

"Is anything wrong?" The president frowned.

"No." The alien's grimace sharpened. "I'm pleased to meet with you." Perhaps the alien was smiling, not frowning.

The president glanced at the clock. Already there were only four and a half minutes left. The alien took a stone from a pocket and held it in his hand.

The president opened his briefcase and took out the note and a pencil.

"What is that?" The alien asked, his red eyes pulsing brighter.

"My notes. I hope you don't mind."

"No, the long thing."

"Well, it's a pencil."

"What do you do with it?"

"I write with it." The president glanced at the clock again. The precious moments were passing too quickly. Four minutes left.

"You write with it?"

"Yes. There's lead in the middle. . . ."

The alien reached out, and the president handed the pencil over for inspection.

"It's not lead."

"No, but we call it lead."

The alien lifted an eyebrow and smiled. Or maybe it was a grimace. "Well, I guess you *could* write with it." There was a long pause while

the alien softly stroked the pencil from end to end with his fingers. "What do you do when the center part is gone?"

The president shrugged. "The wood just holds the . . . uh, lead. The wood we throw away."

The alien's red eyes flamed, and he smiled. "Let me get this straight," he said, his voice almost angry. "You throw away the wood?"

The president nodded. He understood nothing of the conversation he was having, and he glanced nervously over the alien's shoulder to see that there were only three minutes left. There might not be time for all three questions. He decided to start with world peace, but his eyes were drawn to the round stone in the alien's hand. "What's that?" he asked.

The alien handed it to the president, who took it and inspected it in his palm. His hand began trembling again as he recognized it as gold.

"What . . . what do you do with these?"

"I eat them. See?" The alien popped one in his mouth.

The president gasped. "You eat them?"

"They're quite tasty."

"Well, I guess you *could* eat them."

"Try it."

"Uh, could I keep it for later?"

"Certainly," the alien said. "Would you mind if I kept this?" He held up the pencil. "For later. I may want to . . . write something."

The president nodded and slipped the gold nugget into his pocket. Technically, the gift belonged to the American people. But no one would ever know, he thought. He smiled to himself.

"What's wrong?" the alien asked.

"Nothing. Why?"

"You looked sad."

They looked at one another for a while in silence, trying to understand. There were only two minutes left. As soon as he got a chance, he would ask about God and life after death. That was really more important than world peace anyway.

"Would you like another pencil?" the president asked.

"That would be nice," the alien said, and seemed to squirm in his seat. "Perhaps you'd like another nugget. For later."

They both nodded and made the exchange. They looked at each other silently again. Then the president brought his briefcase onto the table and took out several pencils. The alien produced a handful of nuggets.

Only ninety seconds left. Would his species know anything about

human disease? Probably not. No point in asking.

"What is that?" The alien pointed.

"This? My notes."

"May I see?"

The president handed the alien the sheet. The alien put it away hurriedly and handed the president a ruby. "A small present from my species to yours, in the name of . . ."

"Intergalactic relations," the president prompted.

The alien nodded, and the president's eyes settled on the beautiful breastplate. He was not an expert on gems, but it appeared to be covered with blue diamonds. "What is that?" He pointed, hardly noticing there was only a minute remaining.

The alien touched his breast. "My insignia of rank." He seemed to shrug. "I have many of them."

"Yes, of course."

The alien pointed to the president's briefcase. "Your insignia of rank?"

"No, it's just a . . . Would you like to see it?"

The alien appeared to nod, and the president slid the briefcase toward him. He held his breath as the alien unfastened the blue-diamond breastplate and placed it on the table. "In the interest of intergalactic relations?" the alien asked.

The president nodded.

There might be time for one question, but which should it be? The seconds washed away as they stood. There might still be time, but the president had to find a way to hide the breastplate. He took off his coat hurriedly and wrapped it around the blue diamonds. The alien wrapped his powder-green cape around the briefcase.

No, there was no time left, no time to do anything but leave. They went to their respective doors and turned the knobs.

"By the way," the president asked, "do you think there's a God?"

The alien seemed to shrug, and his red eyes pulsed bright. "You got me. You know anything about peace?"

The president shook his head.

They each seemed to have another question, but the final seconds passed silently. Nervously, each left the room.

In the anteroom, the president finished his coffee and cracked his knuckles. *He'll be back*, he thought. *And it won't be a hundred years.* He smiled.

Or maybe it was a grimace. ●



SHELTER FROM THE STORM

by John M. Ford

art: Robert McMahon

The author's new novel is *The Princes of the Air*, due late in 1982 from Timescape Books. He has also promised us more tales of the Alternities Corporation; In the meantime, here is a war story....

Ross Kinbote, defense marshal for Silverburn Territory, did not like being isolated from the Territory. He had come too far to get there. And no place isolated him so much as the Territorial Council conference room. It was long, boxy, and bare, with no furniture except angular chairs and a long black table that bounced back the harsh lights—so unlike their sun's light. There was nothing that made it part of Silverburn Territory, or the world Perathena at all: no plants, no wood, air without scent, bare even of sound. It could have been a room anywhere, on any planet, or for that matter a ship on the zipline between stars.

There were sloped windows at one end; Kinbote stood there, looking out between white linen curtains at Athena setting red in the west. Something moved across the disk: a ship headed for Port White. A large cluster-vessel, no doubt a grain freighter marshalling for the harvest.

Kinbote had a thought. Without turning, he said, "Vane."

"Marshal?" said Vane Ragan, Kinbote's adjutant.

"Post an advisory to Port White Control . . . monitor thrust on incoming freighters. If a ship claims to be running empty and maneuvers like it's full, secure the pad and check it out."

"Yes, sir." Kinbote could hear the click of keys on Ragan's satchel computer. "Do you really expect that sort of assault, sir?"

"No," Kinbote said. "It's been tried in the past, but it's not Draeger's style. Besides, the whole port guard couldn't contain a fully armed squad." He turned away from the window. "No, it's just to get them thinking, at the Port, anyway."

Ragan sat in one of the conference chairs, his thin face very pale in the room light. He was not smiling, but he almost never did. Light from the computer screen flashed greenly in his eyeglasses. He held still for a moment, then said without hesitation: "Your signature, sir, or Defense Command's?"

Kinbote nearly asked if Ragan knew of any difference, but thought that Ragan might misread the joke as displeasure. "My signature, Vane." *After all, he thought, if there is a difference tomorrow, whoever's in my place will want his own name on orders.* "And, Vane—don't send that yet."

Ragan turned from the screen and was about to say something when the door opened. Adam Herstatt of the Territorial Council came in. Ragan blanked the computer screen.

Herstatt was tall, athletic, sharp-faced. "The Council's voted," he said briskly. "We decided that single authority was best, for the duration of the emergency. So . . . until this is over, Ross, you'll report to me as if I were the Council."

"They've suspended fully?" Kinbote said, without emotion.

"No more meetings in chamber, yes; everyone's going back to his own tracts. Except me." He smiled, gestured toward the window. "Doesn't that make military sense, Ross? As close as we are to Port White? A bomb square on City Center—"

"Mercenary troops—" Kinbote had almost said *Draeger*—"don't do that. Politicians hire them; they're careful to display respect for politicians."

"Well! I'm glad someone's safe." Herstatt ran his fingers through his light-brown hair. His smile narrowed. "We've had another confirmation, Ross. The Exans have definitely hired Solomon Draeger."

Kinbote nodded silently.

"Of course, you know what that means," Herstatt said, walking past the table toward the window, loosening his tight gray dress coat. Kinbote turned to follow him, but said nothing. Ragan, Kinbote saw, was not looking at anyone or anything.

Herstatt paused by the curtains. "Exathena couldn't possibly have paid Draeger's price. So the Star Kings must be involved."

"We have nothing an empire could want—"

"Grain? Goldenwood?"

"—in quantities they could use."

"That's not the way they think," said Herstatt, looking out the window toward the towers and pads of the spaceport. "The weakest of them rules more than a hundred systems—*systems*, not worlds. We're not talking about the Territory's resources . . . oh, those'll do to pay the troops and feed the masses, but the Star Kings think in . . . stars, Ross, *space*." Herstatt gestured toward Athena, now a crimson dome crowning the golden forest. "There are ziplines from our star to Keflis, Halliwell A, and Martino's Star, and we're not even fully charted. We're more than just a piece in the game; we're a new square on the board."

Kinbote listened patiently to Herstatt, as he always had.

Herstatt swept his hand toward the sky. "*That's* why it's worth an empire's hiring troops for Exathena. Someone has to rule this system as satrap—and better the Exans than us, not least because when the Star King's ships take our goods away, the Exans won't miss the luxury."

Kinbote thought, but did not say, that Herstatt had now contradicted himself twice on the value of Perathena's resources. He did know, everyone did, that Exathena was poor, out at the limits of the star's biosphere, while Perathena, in a much closer orbit, was rich. But the Exan climate was stable, while the Peran winters were

cruel. Silverburn Territory was only one part of one Perathenan continent. There were more lands and resources, enough for all the Exans to come and make their own wealth. But taking it must have seemed easier. It usually did, until proven otherwise.

Kinbote was going to have to provide that proof.

He said, very carefully, "Colonel Draeger's Greys command a high price. Since they are armored, their overhead is high. However, we have enough resources to hire them."

Herstatt looked intensely at Kinbote. "You're suggesting that we hire him out of his contract?"

Kinbote felt a flash of anger but suppressed it. "Not even a Star King could pay that price." He saw the amused disbelief on Herstatt's face, and was angry again, and held it in again. "I'm suggesting that Exathena might have scraped up a down payment, and promised the rest on success, from our resources."

"I didn't think Solomon Draeger had to accept contracts like that," Herstatt said. "Do you have information I don't? Has his reputation declined recently? Or . . . is there some special reason he might want to attack us? A home for his old age . . . or perhaps for old times' sake."

Well, thought Kinbote, we had to come here. At least it was a quick march. "If you have any doubts about my ability or myself—"

"I don't want your resignation, Ross. In fact, I won't accept it if you give it. Ramalea was a long time ago, another world. Tell me, now: do you have any doubts about defending the Territory? Against Draeger or anyone else?"

"Do you want a full situation report?" Kinbote turned to Ragan, who poised his hands on the computer keys.

Herstatt shook his head. "No, no, Ross. Just a doubt report. Summarized, please."

"Very well. While we have certain advantages of position and dispersal, we have no natural redoubts, or any terrain that would impede an armored force except, perhaps, the Owl River. As for the forces available, I have every confidence in the regular army, but as you know, it is quite small."

"And the militia?"

"They are in good spirits—and will be fighting for their homes—but they will be hard pressed by heavy troops such as Colonel Draeger commands."

"You doubt that you can win, then."

"I do not doubt that we will fight."

Herstatt grinned. "You see why I need you, Ross? You can't lie

to me, even indirectly. With anyone else, I'd have to filter for the truth." He reached inside his coat, took out an offworld cigar—one such as *Star Kings* would smoke, Kinbote thought—and struck it alight. "Not to mention," he said, without the least note of sarcasm, "that someone else might have some illusions about Draeger."

"Is that all then, Adam . . . did the Council give you a title?"

"'Adam' was always good enough, Ross. But you've got a point. Anywhere I have to call you 'Defense Marshal,' you can call me . . . 'Coordinator' sounds about right."

"Then is that all, Coordinator?"

"Yes . . . Marshal. No, wait. If you were Draeger, when would you attack?"

"Before the autumn rains, certainly. Not first rain necessarily, but the later storms certainly. Not only will they hurt his mobility, but he'd obviously want to hand the Territory over to his employers at harvest . . . before winter closes in."

"Then we may have only days," Herstatt said.

"I believe so."

"Then I won't keep you any longer. Good day, Ross."

"Good day, Coordinator."

Kinbote nodded to Ragan, who folded his computer, stood up and slung it over his shoulder.

As Kinbote turned to go, Herstatt suddenly held out his hand; Kinbote took it to shake and felt his wrist gripped tightly. Herstatt's eyes flicked toward the adjutant.

"I'll meet you at the car, Vane," Kinbote said, and heard the door hum open and shut.

"Ross . . . I'm *responsible* now," Herstatt said, in a low voice. "Of course the Council voted me in: why have a hundred necks in the noose when you can have just one? Don't you see . . . when it's over, you'll be all right. Your reputation won't even suffer—so Colonel Draeger beat you twice; the first time was by a hair, and this one isn't even a contest. If the Exans have any sense, they'll keep you right where you are, unless Draeger hires you on. *But I'm going to hang.*"

He released his grip, looked at the end of his cigar. "That's all, Ross. Good night. Best to Elise and the girls."

"Good night, Adam," Kinbote said, and left the room and the building.

Ragan started the skimmer as Kinbote approached; the lift fans spun up and the carriage folded away, leaving the car on hover. Kinbote got in, sealing the soft plastic canopy after him.

"Home, sir?" Ragan said.

"The hospital, first. I want to see Clair."

"Yes, sir." Ragan pushed the control rod and the car glided forward.

Argentine City's streets were nearly empty. Not many people actually lived in the city; services and maintenance personnel from Port White, some storekeepers and technicians who didn't like to commute—maybe two or three percent of Silverburn Territory's quarter-million population.

Kinbote wondered briefly if they could use that against Draeger: trick him into diverting forces to a siege, have the inhabitants put on a show of being five or ten times their actual number.

Pointless, he thought at once. *He'll have his siegecraft; why give him reason to use them?* The skimmer stopped at a traffic signal; a policeman on foot patrol saw Kinbote through the canopy and waved. Kinbote almost snapped a salute, but waved back instead. *Neither of us will kill soldiers for useless gestures. Surely cities deserve as well.*

But how much gesture is useless, and how much must we make?

The Territorial Hospital was a cubical building, its west face a blank slab, its south a chessboard of light and dark windows. Ragan pulled the skimmer into a parking space near the emergency entrance. "Do you want me to wait here, Marshal?"

"I think you'd better bivouac with us now, Vane. Drive home and get your gear, then meet me back here."

"Yes, sir." Kinbote returned Ragan's salute, got out and watched the skimmer move away. He thought: *Houseguests bivouacking. Saluting on all occasions. Welcome back, Colonel Kinbote.* He looked up at the emerging stars. *And Solomon Draeger's on the other side of the hill. Welcome back to war.*

Squinting against the glare, he walked into the hospital.

Heads turned as he entered the Emergency Room; one second later a chime rang, the double doors next to Kinbote hissed open, and a cart rolled in with a man flat upon it and a mobile medic riding on each side.

"This the MI?" said a tall, light-haired woman in a green surgical gown.

"Yes, Clair," said one of the medics, who was doing something around the mouth and nose of the patient. His partner was working at the scanner bank built into the cart. "He'd been collapsed prone for ten, maybe twenty minutes. I think he went into apnea."

"Confirm that," said the scanner operator. "We're just getting

blood O₂ out of the red."

"Vitals?" Clair Kinbote asked calmly.

"Pulse erratic, BP 80 over 40, enceph—correction, BP 40 over nothing."

"He's gonna arrest," said the first medic.

"He just did," said the second, and the scanner screamed.

"Blue Unit," Clair said, and touched a key on her control bracelet. "Let's go." She grasped the control tiller under the cart's front end and steered it, the medics still riding the stirrups, through a blue-bordered door that was not fully open before it started to close again behind the cart and team.

One of the desk staff noticed Kinbote again, found him a chair and a cup of tea. Twenty minutes later, the blue door opened and the patient, a plastic oxygen mask over his face, was rolled out on a plain unpowered cart. A nurse and an orderly took it over from the mobile team, who after a few words with Clair rode their cart back outside.

"Father?" Clair said.

Kinbote stood. Clair had grown up like her mother, tan, fair-haired, light of step. For a moment, in her working clothes, hair banded back, multiprobe dangling a wire from her pocket, she *was* Elise, in a field hospital during a long-ago battle, soothing wounded privates and telling colonels to shut up or else and asking Captain Kinbote what the devil *his* trouble was. . . .

Just a vision, but more than a memory. They would have field hospitals again soon enough, and Clair would run them just as she ran this room. *Welcome back, Ross Kinbote.*

"Clair, I—"

"We heard about the Council vote," she said coolly. Then, with worry: "Adam hasn't—replaced you?"

"No. I don't suppose I can be replaced, now. Even against Colonel Draeger."

"Especially against him," Clair said. "When will you want the report on field medical services?"

Kinbote hesitated. He did not want to talk to Clair about triage and med-evac and wound dressing just now, but there she was, her mother's daughter. He also did not want to ask what he had come to ask, but here he was, Territorial Defense Marshal. "Is Alexis in tonight?"

"No, he's out riding circuit. I wish he *were* here; he's worth two pathologists and a COSMA Twenty any night." A pause. "Mother's not sick?"

"Oh, no, no. I just want to talk to him. Is he in our sector?"

"Close. I can call him if you . . ." Her look changed again, and she let the sentence trail.

"I'll call. Or maybe just wait for him to pass by." He looked at Clair, at the set of her face, the cool hardness of her eyes. He wondered what Dr. Alexis Teal had told Dr. Clair Kinbote, in their line of work and especially outside of it. He wondered other things about the two of them, but the other things were not his affair. He only wished that this one were not.

"This is about a posting for Dr. Teal, isn't it?" she said. "A . . . Defense post."

Then she did know. So Teal had told her, because Elise had not. She had almost asked Kinbote the precise question, daring him to lie, knowing he could not.

So you do love him, he thought, you love him enough to want the truth and too much to ask for it.

"Yes, Clair," Kinbote said.

She nodded, then raised her head as if to speak again.

"Doctor Kinbote," said the desk attendant, "Long and McCone have an elevator accident at the Vanov Building. Three massive traumas; they've called a second unit—"

"Scramble nine units of syntheme," Clair said, touching keys on her bracelet as she turned away from Kinbote. "Get their types and have Stores deblock two bloods and a matched protein each. Then wake up the interns, all of them—"

"Good night, Clair," Kinbote said softly, and went outside. Ahead of him, a skimmer flashed its headlights; he could hear Ragan starting the fans.

He had wanted to talk to his daughter about other things, good things: about life, and love, and what a beautiful young woman she had grown up to be.

As he stepped off the lighted curb, he thought that perhaps, after all, he had.

Kinbote House was a hundred kilometers west of Port White and Argentine City, deep in the forest of golden raintrees Ross Kinbote had watched from the conference room window. A winding track, cut to follow the ground and spare the trees, led from the Territorial road to the main clearing, where the vehicles and machinery were garaged. Paths, and a paneled and vented tunnel for deepest winter, went to the house itself.

It was built of stone and timber: dark fieldstone from the cleared

areas where grain grew now, and goldenwood winter-cured to iron hardness, planed and mortised and fitted with precision and care. The structure of the house, its muscle and bone, were native to the Territory and the world; only its nerves and brain, the electronic communications and controls, came from down the ziplines, bought with red kernels of perawheat and golden lumber. Now there was a pilot plant for polyconductor circuits in Argentine City, and soon—

"— to lose it *now*. That's what's intolerable." Kinbote sat with his wife on the house's broad front porch, the stormshields open to the cool night air. Past the square pillars was a downslope covered with silver grass, further silvered by the light of the moon Pallas, which hung low in the sky and three-quarters full. The smell of grass and trees was crisp, pleasant.

Kinbote stood and walked to a pillar. The porch seat swung gently until Elise stopped it.

Kinbote said, "Five years just to start living with the winters instead of hiding from them. Ten more to make the place something like a home. And how long to lose it? A day to seize Port White. Two days, maybe three, or just one, for Draeger to force a battle. Then ten minutes for me to surrender, or two hours for him to break us to bits and accept a surrender from whoever's left."

"You couldn't fight a guerrilla war," Elise said, not particularly as a question.

"I could," Kinbote said heavily, "but Draeger wouldn't. He's not counter-insurgent . . . and the Exans can't afford a decent COIN unit, so you know what they'd send us instead. House garrisons. Burndown sweeps. Hostages, terror, counter-terror. No, I can't." He looked out at the moonlit grass, the deep forest. "Not that I'd get the chance. Draeger's terms will certainly include Abandonment of Arms . . . for me, this time, a general oath, most likely."

"Do you think an empire is really paying him?"

"I suppose so. Adam certainly hopes so . . . not so hard to understand, I suppose. If you can't live in the company of Star Kings, you can at least challenge them to destroy you."

"Or," said Elise, pouring two cups of tea, "it sounds better to be destroyed by a Star King's thunderbolt than hanged by some Exans."

Kinbote took a hot teacup. "There's always that."

"*Would* they hang him?"

"They very well might." Steam warmed his face. "The Council found the argument convincing."

A moment later Beth Kinbote and Vane Ragan came out of the house. Beth, younger than Clair by five years (or three campaigns,

Elise said), had her father's dark skin and eyes. What Kinbote saw in himself as stockiness had in Beth become compact, dancer's grace. "The books are debugged," she said. "We may show a profit this season . . . thanks to Vane."

Ragan showed no expression. He said, "The lady's asked me to escort her on a tour of the grounds, Marshal. Your permission?"

"Granted," Kinbote said.

"Provided," said Elise, "that you both put on coats."

Ragan started to go inside, but Kinbote said, "Beth, you get them. I need Vane for a moment more."

Beth went in. Kinbote turned to Ragan, saw that the adjutant had dropped into parade rest. Kinbote hoped the darkness hid his smile.

"Sir?" said Ragan.

"Vane, before Adam Herstatt came in on us, you were about to say something. What was it?"

"Sir, you'd ordered me to delay sending the advisory to Port White. I was about to remind you that the conference room is shielded; I couldn't send anything until I was outside it. But I then realized that the reminder was superfluous."

Especially in front of Herstatt, Kinbote thought. "I see. Thank you, Vane."

"Of course, Marshal."

Beth came out with two coats. Ragan helped her into hers, put on his own and belted it. They walked off the porch, down the hill, one dark shape against the silver grass. Kinbote watched them for some minutes, sipping the hot, strong tea.

Elise said, "You told me once that all properly conducted operations begin with reconnaissance."

Kinbote sat down next to her, set the seat swinging. "I don't remember that."

"Of course not. That's what you've got Vane for."

"He'll be with me . . . he should be safe."

She looked at him. "Then there will be fighting."

Kinbote didn't answer. The porch swing creaked on its chains.

"Ross, is there a way?"

"Ten years ago we didn't have anything to lose," he said, just short of bitter. "Five years from now and we'd be able to ignore empires and Exans and everyone else. Now . . . I don't know if there's a way."

"You have to know," she said firmly. "You raised the troops here; you're the only commander-in-chief they've ever had. If anyone knows, it has to be you."

"You talk like Adam Herstatt ought to." Kinbote put both hands

around the teacup, trapping its warmth. "All right. We've got three companies of regulars and five times five companies of militia; three thousand effectives, plus or minus the usual. Draeger will have just over a thousand.

"But those aren't the odds, of course. Much as I admire and respect our neighbors, I'll believe them under arms when I see them. And Draeger's armored, as we all know. We've got no tanks, no decent artillery, and anything we can put in the air he can knock down at the horizon."

Elise said, "And he's Solomon Draeger."

"And?" Kinbote said, too loudly. "Elise, I'll fight him. I'll lock on my rig and lead whoever will march after me."

"I know that," she said quietly, "I just wanted to be sure that you knew."

He stopped the swing, stared at her. She looked the image of serenity in the moonlight, her fair hair gone to silver and her face to marble.

She said, "You know you aren't afraid of fighting, not Solomon Draeger or the Devil himself. So you don't have to be afraid of looking for another way."

Kinbote stood carefully, without shaking the swing, walked to the porch rail and leaned against it, facing Elise. He wondered if Clair had called here after he'd left the hospital. Or if she'd called Alexis Teal, appearing on his call screen spattered with someone else's blood.

That was how Kinbote and Elise had first seen each other. Somehow they had managed to see past it.

He looked down the hill for Vane and Beth but could not see them. He turned back to Elise, saw her still perfectly calm, and thought that without her, he would surely now be dead. He would be dead even if his body were still breathing.

He said, "I'll call Alexis in the morning."

"In the morning," Elise said, and stood, and put her arms around him and her head on his shoulder. She whispered, "Let's go inside."

"Beth and Vane..." Kinbote said, then finished "...have enough sense to come in from the cold."

They went into the house.

At three hours after noon the next day, Ross Kinbote was on the screen to Weather Platform Two, of the three in orbit around Perathena.

Kinbote said, "Understand, now, we're sure Draeger will be stag-

ing from Keflis; a zip to Halliwell or Martino would cost him a lot of time for a very small surprise. But there's nothing to stop him from sending sensor decoys down the zipline from any of them. So when you see a fleet zip in, and you will, very soon, *first* run a discriminator series, *then* call in the alarm. He'll be ninety hours out, when it really is him; we can afford an hour's delay more than a false alert."

"Yes, Marshal. And . . . what then?"

"Then nothing. Draeger's space wing will occupy the platforms; you let them. They'll deploy his scannersat; you let them do *that*. You are not a militia unit; you're civilian noncombatant. Clear?"

"Clear, Marshal," said the face on the screen, disappointment visible.

"Fine," Kinbote said. "You have the alert frequency preset?"

"Of course, sir."

"That's all, then. And thanks. Ground AK 356 out." As Kinbote broke the relay, one of the annunciator lights on the commsole began blinking. Kinbote touched a key, got a view of his approach road from a video pickup high in a raintree.

A rovervan was coming up the road, stirring dust and leaves under its six all-surface wheels. A starburst and staff of Aesculapius, signs for emergency medicine, were painted on the roof.

"Elise," Kinbote said.

She came into the den, tying a scarf over her hair. "I asked Vane to drive Beth and me into the city for some things. We'll be back after sunset; is that long enough for the two of you?"

"More than enough, I hope."

"Good. We'll be bringing Clair back; she said she had that report ready for you."

Kinbote nodded. Obviously the report had been ready last night, but the subject had changed. He pushed his chair back from the commsole, went to Elise and kissed her. "I love you too," she said, and went out.

Suddenly alone in the house, Kinbote looked around the den. It was paneled in Sardissian oak from just beyond the Territory, with ceiling beams of goldenwood. On the walls were images of soldiers, from painted pictures of ancient hoplites and hussars to multigraphs of skystrikers; crossed rifles, before the banner of Kinbote's Rangers; a rack of books, bound paper editions of the field library Kinbote had carried in microform on campaign, Thucydides and Clausewitz and von Mellenthin to Grahame and Falkenberg.

On one wall was a velvet-lined case of ceremonial sidearms, pistols

and swords. Each one was a prize, taken from an officer Kinbote had defeated in the field.

All but one. At the bottom of the case was a straight-bladed sword, the half-basket hilt of silver, the grip padded with blue velvet. Kinbote had once worn the sword, but it was not his. He had carried it into battle at Ramalea . . . and there lost it, to Solomon Draeger.

But Draeger had never appeared to collect it. He had never appeared at all. The copter that lifted Kinbote from the field had a civilian crew and an armed civil guard. Draeger had been similarly removed. The politics of which they had been the extension had disposed of them both, packaged them and shipped them out like two loads of suddenly unfashionable consumer goods.

Kinbote had gathered his wife and daughters and gone to Perathena, where the fashion was different. Draeger, likewise, had gone elsewhere to war.

This room, with its books and the weapon case and the Ramalea sword, was Kinbote's whole memory, his whole soul. And it was here that Alexis Teal had come, to talk, five years ago.

Dr. Teal had come to Perathena almost a year before, and had surprised everyone on the hospital staff by at once volunteering to ride as circuit physician to the outlying households. Some of the staff had been doubtful, pointing out that a less-than-competent doctor might prefer to work where no one looked over his shoulder.

That talk did not last long. Teal was a first-rate physician, surgeon, one-man trauma team, and (inevitably) scratch veterinarian. After his first winter not a few people, including entire families, owed him their lives.

The following spring Clair got her EMD, and of course Alexis Teal was invited to the party at Kinbote House. Kinbote found him admiring the den with more than casual interest and asked him to return under quieter circumstances.

The night he came to visit, Beth was visiting a friend. Clair was interning in the Emergency Room she would eventually run. Kinbote, Elise, and Dr. Teal sat in the den over sandwiches and middle-aged brandy, while a warm spring breeze whispered through the windows.

Teal was lean and wiry, with light skin and very black hair and eyebrows. His eyes were liquid black, with a more-than-physical darkness that Kinbote found hard to look at and hard to look away from.

They talked about medicine, and the world and the Territory; but there in the den the talk turned inevitably to war. And Teal knew

war: battles, leaders, weapons, tactics, in detail that astonished Kinbote.

"Alexis," he said, "you know enough to have been a general—"

"A general's adjutant," Elise said.

"—do you have some military background?"

Teal, animated a moment before, was suddenly quite still in his chair. "Yes," he said, and that was all he said.

Kinbote said, "You know that in the Territory we don't ask where you're from or what you did there." Maybe Teal was a washout from an Academy or War College somewhere. Or an officer's son who couldn't follow his parent's lead, for whatever reason. Or even one of those pacifists who could not let war alone with their minds, even as their hearts abhorred it. "You must have heard of me," he added. "After Draeger at Ramalea, my record's no secret."

"Mine is," Teal said, "but I'll tell you."

"You were a soldier?" Elise asked.

Teal smiled. "I was a secret weapon."

Kinbote poured more of the golden, heady brandy.

"The project," Teal said, "was called GENIE. Greatest Effectiveness Nexus Identification and Elimination . . . though I don't know whether the acronym was invented before or afterward.

"Anyway . . . the idea was: what do you want to do to an enemy army?"

Teal and Elise both looked at Kinbote. "Destroy its ability to fight," he said automatically.

Teal nodded. "And traditionally, you do that by causing enough casualties in it to destroy its structure. Like smashing at a stone wall with a sledge until it crumbles. But there's another way to knock a wall down."

Elise said, "Find the keystone."

Teal said, "Find the nexi of greatest effectiveness . . . and eliminate them."

"You're a commando?" Kinbote said.

Teal looked into his spherical glass, as if looking for a vision within it. "The Project Prototypes . . . that's what they called us: 'Prototypes' . . . were trained to the practical limits of human training in system-analytic techniques, and infiltration tactics . . . and personal killing methods. We were one-person search-and-destroy teams, designed to find the key people among the enemy. And eliminate them."

Slowly, Kinbote said, "'Eliminate' doesn't necessarily mean 'kill.'" He was thinking, without real alarm, that as Defense Mar-

shal for Silverburn Territory he must be a key person. And as near as the telescreen was, it was a long way to any physical help.

"I don't really know, Marshal. None of us was ever . . . activated." He looked up at them, his eyes very dark, and Kinbote could see the agony in them like a color. "The Project was . . . shut down before any of us was used." He looked down again, and Kinbote was horrified by the relief he felt. "An empire collapsed, in fact." Teal looked at his long, delicate fingers, arched one hand and balled it into a fist.

"Adam Herstatt says in Council that no Star King's ever fallen," Kinbote said, without real thought, and Elise spoke over him.

"Are your medical papers real?" she said. "Understand, Alexis, I'm not asking if you're a physician. We all know *that*. But if the documents are faked, we should get you some real ones."

"Yes, they're real," Teal said. He smiled, finally, making his look bearable again. "I already knew everything there was to know about how systems work, including biosystems. And anatomy . . . the combat training covered that very well. I was a top-grade med student."

He drank some more. He'd put away quite a bit, but Kinbote had seen every sort of drunkenness and this wasn't any of them. It must be metabolism; it certainly wasn't mass.

Teal said, "You're the only people who know this. Not just the only ones here, the only people, period."

"No reason for it not to stay that way," Kinbote said. He leaned forward, half-consciously slipping a hand into Elise's. "Alexis . . ."

"No, it's not the name I was born with."

"Not what I was going to say. I can understand your wanting to hide. And I swear we'll respect that. But you're Territorial now. It doesn't matter what you were before."

Teal stood up slowly, turned to face the rack of weapons on the wall. He was reflected in the glass, darkly. When he finally spoke, the sound seemed to come from a very great distance, as wind shearing from a mountain peak. "You don't understand, Mr. Kinbote. It's not something I was. It's something I *am*. I'm . . . a werewolf." He turned to face them again, and even his look seemed to come from far off. "I mean that literally. I'm a supernatural monster, in—temporary—human form."

Kinbote squeezed Elise's hand, which was suddenly very cold and impossibly rigid—

He stood by the den table, an empty glass tight in his hand. He looked at it for a moment, then put it on the table with another

glass and a crystal decanter of whisky. He pushed two armchairs before the fireplace, poked up the burning logs.

He went out on the porch. Dr. Teal was coming up the path, head down, hands in the pockets of his green jacket. He paused for a moment, turning slightly, evidently looking at something in the brush that Kinbote could not see. Then he came on, finally looking up.

His skin had weathered in five years, though he seemed never to tan or freckle. His hair was still absolutely black—though Kinbote had to remind himself that Teal could hardly be more than thirty—and his eyes still had the darkness that was only partly physical.

"Alexis," Kinbote said.

"Ross." He took Kinbote's hand; his grip was tight, dry.

"Come on in and be welcome, Alexis. We'll have a drink and talk."

"Yes, Ross," Teal said, looking past Kinbote into the house. "I think we had better do that."

They went in, and Teal unsealed his jacket. Underneath it he wore an equipment harness, white webbing hung with pouches and instruments. It reminded Kinbote, almost unpleasantly, of battlerig. Teal put a finger on the latch release, then gave his head a small shake and sat down before the fireplace, still wearing the harness.

Kinbote poured two large whiskies, handed one to Dr. Teal. "Here's to."

"To the dark side of the moon," Teal said, clicked glasses with Kinbote, then took a long swallow, casually, as if there were no other way to drink whisky.

Kinbote sipped at his own drink, sat down. "Alexis, you know what I'm going to ask you."

"I've known for weeks what you were going to ask, Ross." He drank again. "I think I've known, ever since I first told you my little secret, what you were going to ask." There was a tension in his voice, but it was not anger, nor pain.

"You don't think I deliberately planned—"

"No." Teal shook his head. "Not in the least. I know all about military planning, right? I've been wondering if anyone planned it. If anyone had to."

He emptied his glass. Kinbote poured him another. "I don't follow you. You know I won't—can't—force you into anything you don't want. You're certainly serving the Territory—"

"You *don't* follow, Ross." Teal stared into the fireplace. "When I told you what I . . . am, maybe I wasn't just being honest, or trying

to share the secret, or whatever. Maybe I wanted you to find a way to use me." A gulp. "Now you have."

He spoke more quickly, as if a motor were accelerating within him. He kept drinking. "You don't know what it's like. I don't think anyone *can* know, but I'll try anyway. Things happen, inside my head. I'll be palpating a throat for swollen glands, and suddenly I'll think that a finger, thrust just so, will smash the larynx. The same with a kidney, the tip of a sternum, an eye. Now and again—now and again I'll see someone walking alone—in the city or the country, it doesn't matter—and know that I could kill that person, in the dark or broad daylight, and dispose of the body so it'd never be found, or make it look like suicide, or any sort of accident, or even a murder no one would ever solve.

"And then too, I'll be in bed, late, and I won't be able to sleep because I know the city is out there, lying asleep, naked and helpless in the night, and I could—"

Kinbote suddenly felt Teal's index finger against his throat, throbbing with the carotid pulse.

Teal went to the desk, poured another drink, downed half of it and topped up again. "I could, Ross. I really could."

"But you haven't," Kinbote said calmly, carefully. He had never seen this man before. He wondered if anyone had. If Clair had.

"No. I haven't. Anyone I've killed I did in honestly, in the best traditions of medicine." He sat down again. "I could, Ross. But *I may not*. You understand why, of course? You of all people?"

Kinbote nodded. "Your unit was never activated. You need an order."

"There are parts of my training," Teal said, "that I can't reach consciously. Parts of my mind are closed to me. Do you remember asking me if 'eliminate' had to mean 'kill'? I suspect it doesn't. But I'm not sure. And I don't know what else it might mean. There are only . . . shadows." He looked into his glass. "Drinking is a shadow, you know, Ross."

"For a lot of people."

Teal laughed. "Alcohol depresses the manic response. I must have one hell of a manic response. Not to mention one hell of a set of biological filters."

Teal sat in the chair, hands together on his glass, feet spread out flat on the floor, his whole body a flexed spring. Kinbote knew what the tension was, in the pose and the voice. It was sheer anticipation.

"You can accept an activation order from me?"

"Yes."

"Only from me?"

"Yes."

"What form does it have to take?"

"Just tell me to go."

They sat in silence for a long moment. Teal's eyes were black coals, reflecting the firelight. The energy in his thin frame was such that it seemed he must shortly snap and fly apart.

But Kinbote knew that would not happen. He knew how long a man could hold that pose.

Teal said, "You mustn't wait too long. If I'm not operational from the very first, I'm wasted."

"I understand. They'll zip in ninety hours out. Is that enough lead time?"

"That's enough." He faced Kinbote. "Is that your order, then? Activate on warning?"

"You don't want me to cut you formal orders?"

"Of course not."

It had been fifteen years since Kinbote had actually given an attack order, actually sent men out to face an armed enemy. He had always been cautious—but he had never been hesitant. He had not abandoned caution; he would not adopt hesitation. "Then as Defense Marshal for Silverburn Territory, I assign you as of now to a tripwire counterforce role. Immediately upon identification of hostile forces within our system space, you are to commence operations against those forces."

Teal closed his eyes, took a deep breath that made his harness whisper and jingle. When he exhaled, it seemed that the terrible tension was breathed out as well. He looked up. "Acknowledged." Then he said, not particularly to Kinbote, "Well, that's it."

They went out on the porch. The setting sun filtered through the trees, turning their red and gold leaves into pure fire. The silver grass rippled in a small cold breeze.

"I'll be going on around the circuit," Teal said. "No term pregnancies or other imminent crises, fortunately. Tomorrow I'd better do a checkdown on Ariel Danaher's support pump. And run the file on the children's inoc series . . ."

All at once he was the Alexis Teal that Kinbote had always known. *You were hurt badly once, Alexis, he thought, twisted hard. But you're not a monster, as you think. I've known monsters who looked like men . . . but that's what they were: beasts. The werewolf is just a sad, romantic myth. "Why don't you stay the night here, Alexis? . . . Clair's coming home tonight."*

"No, thank you, Ross." Teal touched a hard wooden pillar, arching his fingers; he looked into the red sun. "I just realized I've got to go to the Danahers' tonight. Tomorrow won't do." He turned to Kinbote, who was suddenly still. "The weather, Ross, you know. And the phase of the moon. You can probably work it out consciously . . . I know, but I can't tell why. Not yet."

"*Draeger?*" Kinbote said, looking at the starless, shipless sky, not quite believing but not able to disbelieve.

"You see," Teal said, and the color of pain was vivid in his eyes. "I'll be going now, Ross. My best to your family."

"Is there anything you need, Alexis?" Kinbote said, as Teal stepped off the porch. "Supplies, weapons—"

"Nothing." His look darted to the woods again. Kinbote still saw nothing. "There never was anything. Except the order."

When Teal had gone down the path, Kinbote went back into the house and sat down at the commsole, his still unfinished glass of whisky at his elbow.

There was no point in calling the orbital stations; he'd only alarm and confuse them. The commsole had a battle computer component, but there was no real use in that, either. His inputs and interpretations would be too heavily prejudiced. He really did not think that Teal was wrong.

He was still sitting there, his head in his hands, his drink untouched, when a hand touched his shoulder. He looked up at the face, said, "Clair, I—"

And stopped, because it was not Clair but Elise. He shook his head, knowing that there had been nothing to say anyway. Elise's fingers brushed his cheek, and she went out, closing the door behind her, giving him the time alone he needed.

It was two hours before midnight. Beth was asleep, Elise reading in bed, Vane Ragan in the kitchen with his satchel computer. Kinbote had returned to the den after dinner; he was examining perspective maps of the terrain around Port White.

Clair came in. She still wore her work whites but had taken off her shoes and hairband. She had a large bag over her shoulder; she set it on the table and pulled out a sheaf of papers. The bag slumped over. "The medical report," she said. "I'll leave it—"

"I'm not busy," Kinbote said, switching off the map. "Tell me about it. Are there any problems?"

"No immediate ones. We have enough mobile units and crews without completely stripping the civilian system." She put the report

down, tapped it with her short fingernails. "The unit teams have been told not to carry anyone in uniform and unwounded."

"Even across town in the rain?" Kinbote said, smiling.

"Even Defense Marshals." Clair smiled too. "And we've taken the five-millimeter rifles out of the units. The circuit doctors are—" Her smile disappeared, and she finished flatly "—turning theirs in as they check through."

Kinbote nodded.

"So everyone will be disarmed except me."

"What do you mean, except you? You're a—"

"A major, and the ranking medical officer, or I will be once the militia's activated. By Field Regulations that gives me the right to carry a sidearm."

Kinbote sighed. "Did you get that from the Regs or your mother?"

"Both."

"Well. All right, Major. Just a moment." Kinbote took a ring of keys from his pocket, went to the case of weapons on the wall and opened it. Without hesitation he took a pistol from the rack: a Gage and Rixon 10mm automatic, with zebrawood grips and silver chasing on the frame and slide. It was the plainest weapon in the case, but the most reliable, and the only one of a combat caliber. When Kinbote taught his daughters to shoot, he had also taught them what guns were for. Giving Clair a beautiful little dress pistol would have been an insult and a lie.

Clair took the pistol, checked the action, turned to a window and dry-fired it in a perfectly smooth motion.

"Thank you, Father." As she tucked the pistol into her bag, she looked suddenly distraught, but it passed in an instant.

"I'll get you some loads for it."

"No," she said. "I'll do that. You loaded mine."

Kinbote didn't understand, but Clair was already shouldering the bag. "Good night, Father."

"Good night, Clair. If Mother's still up as you pass, tell her I'll be along soon."

Without answering, she bent her head, and Kinbote kissed her on the cheek. As she drew away, he saw that she was staring past him, at the silent commsole. Then she turned and walked away, lightly in her stocking feet.

Kinbote went back to the table, reached for the report. Near it was a book that had not been there earlier, apparently fallen from Clair's bag. Kinbote picked it up.

Feral eyes, black with flares of red, stared at him from above

bloodied white fangs. The title, in lurid red, was LEGENDS OF THE WEREWOLF.

Kinbote lifted the cover. On the flyleaf was written:

Clair—

No secrets,
all the truth.

Alexis

Kinbote knew, then, what Clair had meant. *I gave you an empty gun. You loaded it.*

There was another line of Teal's angular handwriting at the bottom of the page. It read:

If. Page 127. Please.

He began flipping pages. 60—80—100—120—121—

The commsole's call light flashed. Kinbote put the book down, went to the board and touched keys.

"Marshal Kinbote," said the weatherman on the screen, "we have a sensor trace of a fleet of ships at the Keflis endpoint."

"Checked and confirmed?"

The weatherman showed him. Sensor images were backed up with



computer analysis and optical scanning. It was not a decoy. In a few hours the points on the scanplate would resolve into the arrows and discs of air and space fighters, the clustered coffins of carrier ships. The shaft of the spear, whose head was a thousand of the best troops in existence.

And the point of the spear: Colonel Solomon Draeger.

"All right," Kinbote said. "I'm declaring a full alert as of . . . 2100 Port White time. When I break off with you, you're to alert Platforms Two and Three: you all know your routine. Establish tightbeam now. I'll be in touch."

"Yes, Marshal."

"Very well. Ground A—Ground Defense Two out."

Kinbote rang the intercom to the kitchen. "Vane, come here. Bring your black box." Without waiting for an answer, he punched out a personal callnumber. The ringer pulsed for three full minutes, but finally Adam Herstatt appeared, disheveled, half-dressed and more than half-asleep. The sight of Kinbote woke him above halfway.

"Ross . . . is it them?"

"It's them. I've declared alert as of the hour."

"I'd better convene . . . no, I suppose I hadn't." At that thought, Herstatt's head seemed to clear. "Let me check my board." He touched keys below his screen. "No declaration of war received yet."

"Exathena can't spot them for forty minutes yet," said Ragan from behind Kinbote. "Then twenty-five minutes for a message to get here."

"... like this always happen in the middle of the night," Herstatt said.

"Adam, I've got more calls to make. I'll be in the city a little after dawn. I'll see you then."

"Of course, Ross. I've got calls to make, too." Herstatt broke relay.

"Marshal," said Ragan, "I'll make the alert-net calls. You should sleep for a few hours."

"I—yes, of course, Vane." *Never usurp your subordinates' authority.* "There's just one I have to make personally."

"Yes, sir."

"Vane . . . would you leave the room, please?"

"Certainly, sir," and he did.

Dr. Teal answered the call instantly. He was half in darkness, half in moonlight, and fully awake. "They're out there, Ross?" It was not really a question.

Kinbote nodded. Teal turned his head, so that his face disappeared from view. Behind him, Kinbote could see a rack of equipment. He had supposed Teal would be wired into the Danahers' commsole, or

at one of the other houses down the road; but he was in the back of his rover.

Suddenly Teal's neck bent back. Then he relaxed, his hands moving below the screen. He turned back, half-lighted again. "Activation confirmed, Marshal. No further contacts."

"Alexis, I don't—"

"You'll see my work. I'm not answerable in the field, of course; can't be. I will report directly to you . . . once." He smiled, showing teeth very white in the moonlight. "That may or may not be in the training. But it's in the legend."

"Alexis—how do I—" he knew the answer as he said it—"recall you?"

"You don't, Ross." A bullet once fired is irrevocable.

Teal leaned forward and broke the relay. His eyes—

"Rest well, sir," Ragan said as Kinbote walked past him.

Kinbote paused by the bedroom door, put a hand on the frame. He looked down the hall. Clair was standing outside her room, looking at him; her expression was not intense, but the small sadness there was more devastating than rage could have been.

She knew, of course, he thought. He would have told her everything, not left her to guess what I should have understood at once.

What I kept telling him I did understand.

Kinbote turned his head. Elise sat in bed, watching him, her hand on the bedside lamp. From Clair to Elise was a sudden trip in time, past to present to—

Elise turned out the light, and there was darkness. The future.

Surely, he thought, it had only been some light from the board, even his imagination, that had put the blood-red sparks in Alexis Teal's moonlit eyes.

It was just after the dawn of the following day, clear and cold. Seventeen hundred men and women under arms were in the Argentine City square, facing three men on a reviewing stand.

Draeger's ships were sixty hours away.

Kinbote and Ragan wore heavyweight field uniforms, tan, without battlerigs. They had raincoats rolled on their shoulders, as was customary in the Territory just before the autumn rains.

Adam Herstatt wore a finely tailored civilian suit, deep red, with a silver dress cape unrolled and draped over one shoulder, rippling in the slight breeze. It was not lost on anyone, certainly not Kinbote, that Herstatt had draped himself in the colors of the Territorial flag.

Herstatt looked out over the ranks, said to Kinbote: "The regulars

look good, Marshal."

"Yes, Coordinator," Kinbote said. He knew he was not being complimented. Herstatt's tone was quite clear, and he was looking not at the four hundred Regulars but at the militia.

There was no denying that thirteen hundred armed souls in close ranks made for spectacle. No matter that each had his or her own idea of military dress, military armament; or that the close ranks wavered like grain in a wind. Their service armbands made them uniformed soldiers according to the laws of war.

But before Kinbote and Herstatt—and Draeger, and God—they were not soldiers, even if they were brave and determined. Kinbote knew how very much bravery and determination were worth. But they would need even more than that.

Kinbote wondered if Herstatt could see the troops' strengths. But he had in fact seen their weakness, and for that Kinbote's respect for Herstatt rose a little. Perhaps the Coordinator had a touch of Caesar in him after all.

Herstatt stepped forward, touched the pickup at his throat. "Citizens of Silverburn Territory," he said, and amplifiers threw it across the square; the buildings echoed it back. "You have chosen, freely, to make the ultimate commitment to your land, to your friends and your loved ones, standing against those who would take all that you have built . . ."

As Herstatt spoke, Kinbote thought about commitments: about the twenty-seven hundred and forty-six militia the official registers said he had, and the thirteen hundred and twelve who stood in the square . . . twenty-eight hours after a full alert. Of his regulars, only three were absent, and those were in the hospital.

He had no moral right to surrender them without a battle. And he had no moral right to slaughter them in a battle they could not win. Draeger and a thousand against Kinbote and seventeen hundred and nine . . . plus one, of course. One untried irregular who thought he was a supernatural monster.

" . . . that the valiant never fall in vain!" Herstatt finished, and held a hand high in the air. The militia raised a roar, some lifting their weapons: Kinbote looked for shots fired, but the officers seemed to be controlling that. The regulars stood quietly at parade rest.

Herstatt smiled, lowered his hand; the cheers slowly died away. Yes, Kinbote thought, *the touch of Caesar*.

Herstatt stepped back. Kinbote went forward. Without using his audio pickup, he said, "First Regiment: Regimental Sergeant-Major!"

The regular RSM stepped forward. "Sir!"

"Dismiss your troops."

"Yes, *sir!*" The RSM pivoted smartly. "Regiment . . . dis . . . miss!"

Rank by rank, without a misstep, the three companies of the First marched off the square.

"First Militia Regiment: Regimental Sergeant-Major!"

As Kinbote had hoped, the example of the First put some order back into the five militia regiments, and they left the square without serious incident. When the plaza was empty, the police cordons were dissolved and crowds of onlookers—some of them, Kinbote knew, with their names on the militia rolls—filtered in.

The three men left the platform. Ragan drove Kinbote to the City Center building, by a different route from Herstatt's. As the adjutant turned the car aside, Kinbote could see the crowds beginning to cluster around Herstatt's skimmer.

Kinbote and Ragan had been in the conference room for fifteen minutes when Herstatt came in, trailing his cape on the air.

"Well, Ross," he said, "I've trusted you to keep me informed of the military realities. Now we see the social realities. What do you have to say?"

"Nothing further at this time, Coordinator. Unless you want—"

"No, Ross, I do not want your resignation!" Herstatt's tone was amused, not angry. "I only want to know what happens now. Militarily." Then, seriously but without heat: "Is that too much to tell me?"

"We have plans for a containment action at Port White, then a strategic withdrawal to the Owl River."

"You'll abandon the city?"

"I can't defend the city; only draw fire on it. The route of withdrawal will draw the enemy across some of the least valuable land in the area."

Herstatt opened his mouth to speak, closed it, then after a pause said, "Your house is in that direction, isn't it?"

"A long way beyond the river."

"All right. What happens when you reach the river?"

"We'll fight."

Herstatt looked down at Kinbote. His face was set and his voice was very cool. "And when will you stop fighting?"

Kinbote locked eyes with Herstatt. "When the battle is over."

Herstatt's eyes narrowed slightly; then he turned away. He sank into a chair, his cape wrinkling over the back. "Yes," he said. "I suppose that is all I could have expected."

Kinbote said, "The military alternatives—"

"What alternatives?" Herstatt's voice peaked and fell. He sounded suddenly exhausted, close to desperate. "What do you know about alternatives?"

"The military alternatives," Kinbote said again. "I command an army, Coordinator. I can't, by definition, solve any problem but a military one or achieve any but a military solution."

For a moment Herstatt seemed to sink in upon himself; then he straightened and stood, placing one hand lightly on the back of his chair. He extended the other. "Of course you're right, Ross. Will you forgive me?"

Something in Herstatt's tone made Kinbote cautious, but he took the offered hand. "Of course, Coordinator."

Herstatt's eyebrows rose slightly. "You . . . you know, Ross, that title's beginning to wear on me. I may soon start to hate it."

The door opened. A Council page stood there with a message print in her hand. "Coordinator, for you."

Herstatt did not wince this time. "Yes, of course." He read the sheet with a deepening frown. "Bad news, I'm afraid, Ross. Doctor Alexis Teal's been killed."

"How?" Kinbote was not certain how to receive the news.

"A rover accident, northwest quarter. A limb must have fallen, and he lost control. Crashed and burned."

"Did he say anything before he died?" There was a chance the accident was real, the death real. A remote chance.

"Apparently there wasn't enough left to say a word." *Then he's alive and working*, Kinbote thought. Herstatt said, "Oh, that's callous. He was a good man, wasn't he?"

"Yes," Kinbote said, with not half the force it deserved.

"We'll have to do something, when there's time. A memorial of some sort." Herstatt folded the paper and put it inside his coat. He produced a cigar, looked at it thoughtfully before igniting it. "How war makes callous beasts of us all." He smiled, barely. "One of our doctors. I hope that's not an omen. Do you believe in omens, Ross?"

"No," Kinbote said. "I've never believed in the supernatural at all."

Kinbote poked at the logs in the den fireplace; they sent up a fountain of orange sparks and a warm sweet smell. The only lights in the room were the fire, a small white spotlight on the desk, and the commsole screen, showing a weathermap just sent down from orbit. A pot of black tea and the whisky decanter stood on the table.

Draeger was forty hours out.

It was 0400, and only Kinbote was awake in the house. He had slept from afternoon to early evening, shifting his cycle to meet Draeger's. The Greys would have full night gear, and Draeger would hardly wait for dawn.

Kinbote poured tea and whisky and went back to the weather display. The first rainfront of autumn was expected in four to five days. Draeger would be on the ground then. The only question was how far he would have gone.

If it weren't the first rain, Kinbote thought, it might make a difference. With his fliers grounded, his tanks bogged and his skimmers clogged . . . General Mud has beaten armies before.

Abruptly Kinbote wondered if Herstatt was right: had he deliberately ignored alternatives?

No. Alternatives to a fight, maybe. I mustn't underestimate my wanting to fight. But alternatives to defeat—never.

He recalled the morning before, when Herstatt had gone from rage to despair to smooth apology in the space of moments; it had touched warning nerves in Kinbote, and now he realized why. He had seen that response in officers before.

It came when one all at once discovered, absorbed, and accepted that one was committed to a course that must save or else destroy.

Kinbote blanked the map and stared at his dark reflection in the screen, looking for that same hard but brittle surface.

"Father?"

Beth stood in the doorway. "May I talk to you?"

"Of course," Kinbote said, putting his drink aside. "Come in."

She sat down on the carpet before him, smoothing her long woolen nightdress with her dark-skinned hands. Kinbote recalled that thirty years ago he had preferred floors and grassy ground to chairs.

"It must be important, Beth, for oh-dark-thirty in the morning."

"I would like your permission," she said, measuring the words, "to join the Territorial Militia."

Kinbote nodded gravely. "Have you been talking with Vane?"

"Yes . . . but he didn't ask me to join, and I didn't tell him I was going to ask you."

"He had something to do with it, though, didn't he?"

She clasped her hands. "He was very angry. I don't think I've ever seen him so angry, and . . . and . . ."

Kinbote thought *then, daughter, you've seen much more than I.* "About the militia review, yesterday?"

"He said he hated them. He was ashamed to be a citizen of the

Territory, he said." She looked up. "Not one of the regular army; he said he was never as proud to be one of them. I think . . . he was mostly ashamed for you. That they did so badly in front of Councillor Herstatt." She stared at her hands, tensed on her knees. "And . . . that so many of them were cowards to begin with."

Kinbote said gently, "And you want to join, so Vane will understand that you're not afraid."

"No! I—I just want to be where he is."

It was not a lie; it was just not all of the truth. "Beth, you know you're old enough to join a militia unit without asking me. And if it's what you decide you want to do, then you have my permission. But listen to me first."

She nodded.

"This is the Territorial Defense Marshal talking, Beth, not your father. Look at me."

She did.

"A good commander can't ask his troops to do anything he wouldn't do himself. And if he loves them—and if he *is* a leader, he must—he can't help wishing that he was taking what they have to take. Not just the bad food and the cold rain; he'd better be taking those, along with them. But fighting for them, suffering for them, dying for them . . . he can't do those. Once we had duels of champions, but not any more.

"If you go out there, you can't protect Vane; battlefields aren't like that. And Vane won't be able to protect you. But he will wonder where you are, what's happened to you, if a movement I order will put you in special danger. Wouldn't you feel that way?"

She nodded. She was about to cry; he did not want to make her cry. "I'm selfish, Beth. In the field I'm going to need Vane all to myself. I can't share him with you."

Her lip bent down. Thirty years ago, had he still known how to cry? Once he had known. But so many Vane Ragans had died since then.

"And even more than I'll need him, he'll need you, waiting for him. Waiting for someone, when you'd give anything to be there, is the bravest thing there is."

The tears began, jewels in the firelight. "But—will Vane—"

"Darling, he's too good a man not to know it," Kinbote said, and hugged his daughter tight.

Adam Herstatt sat alone in the Councillors' Lounge, brooding over a chessboard. He touched a bishop, stroked his finger across the

screen to take a pawn; the machine castled. Herstatt gave no sign of having noticed Kinbote.

"Coordinator," Kinbote said, "my troops are in position around the Port. The enemy is expected to land within three hours. I request orders."

"Check," Herstatt said.

"Coordinator Herstatt."

"Check . . . mate."

Kinbote said nothing.

Herstatt blanked the screen, turned. He wore his red formal suit, without the cape. His eyes were sunken. "Ross, you are the supreme military authority on this planet just now." He gave no special emphasis to the last two words.

"And as such, Coordinator, I am requesting orders for the conduct of operations, from the supreme civilian authority."

Herstatt tilted his head. One of his cigars and a bottle of offworld brandy sat beside him. He had certainly been drinking, but he did not appear drunk. "You seemed to know well enough what you wanted to do."

"I apologize for having exceeded my authority. At the conclusion of hostilities I am willing to face formal charges by the Council."

"At the *conclusion*—" Herstatt looked confused, angry, not a little frightened. Then he gained control of himself—whether courage, or something else, Kinbote was not certain.

Herstatt said, "Now I see, Marshal. You're just not living in the real universe. You never were. There isn't an Exan mercenary force out there, facing militia who march with their shoes untied. There aren't any politics, or Star Kings, and nobody's going to die. There's just you, and Draeger, alone on the field of destiny—"

If only it were, Kinbote thought.

"—and when it's all over, we'll have formal charges, with tea and cakes afterward, no doubt. If you had *any idea* of what's about to happen—"

"Colonel Draeger will land in . . ."

"Two hours twenty minutes," Vane Ragan said, "sir."

"All right," Herstatt said, "all right, it's no use. You want to know what to do with the battle?" He stood, shakily at first, then struck a firm, even heroic, pose. "*Win it*, Marshal. That's an order." He looked toward the windows; outside, visible through the drawn curtains, search beams swept back and forth across the night sky. "Will there be anything else, Marshal?"

"No, Coordinator. Thank you."

They left Herstatt standing there, a marble Caesar.

In Kinbote's skimmer, its Territorial and Marshal's flags fluttering as they drove toward Port White, Ragan said, "Permission to speak freely, Marshal?"

"Granted."

"Sir, was that necessary?"

"I hadn't received proper orders. I couldn't proceed without them."

"Of course, sir," Ragan said. "And if he'd ordered you to surrender the whole force—"

"Then I would have surrendered it, Vane. And myself with it."

"I understand *that*, sir," Ragan said tightly. "I didn't mean—"

"I know, Vane. But Herstatt didn't. That's why he ordered me to fight."

"Sir?"

"He expects me to do as I want, regardless of any order; attack if I can win, surrender if I can't. He didn't expect me to ask for orders at all; when I did, he thought I must be trying to protect myself."

"If I had orders to surrender, I couldn't be accused of cowardice for failing to attack—and if I did, and won, I'd have saved the Territory from Herstatt's bad judgment."

"Whereas with orders to attack, he becomes a hero . . . a Caesar, if you like . . . if we win. And if we surrender, then I'm a disobedient coward."

"Then, sir . . . still speaking freely . . . you always intended to give the Colonel a battle."

Always? Kinbote thought. *Before I cut Teal's orders? Before I built Kinbote House? Before they took me away from Ramalea?* Looking straight ahead through the windshield, he said, "Too much has happened, Vane . . . I have to try."

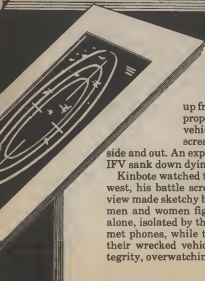
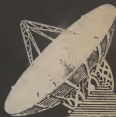
At six minutes to midnight the sky broke open.

Assault boats came down screaming and jittering, their carbon-filament hulls heated orange in the atmosphere. They shifted too fast for guns or missiles to track, and Kinbote had only a few beam projectors, actually mining bores mounted on trucks.

The boats fired decelerator charges at the last instant, then hit ground with their doors already opening, covering fire spraying from automatic heavy repeaters in the hulls. The sloped gray noses of infantry fighting vehicles emerged, shielded lift fans droning, mine probes feeling out to front and sides.

It seemed luck might be falling with the defenders. One of the mining beams caught a boat above its ablative belly; the ship skit-





tered away, skipped off the ground and struck at an angle with one door buried and the other in the air. A soldier popped up from a slit trench and put a rocket-propelled grenade into the fans of a vehicle half out of its boat; metal screamed and chunks of blade flew inside and out. An explosion flared within the door. The IFV sank down dying, its occupants bailing out.

Kinbote watched this from his command post to the west, his battle screen showing him a monochrome view made sketchy by light-boosters. He could see his men and women fighting hard, but fighting mostly alone, isolated by their trenches, not using their helmet phones, while the troops that had jumped from their wrecked vehicle were preserving fireteam integrity, overwatching as they moved.

The Territorial grenadier popped up again with another round in his launcher. Suddenly red tracers bracketed him, and his whole body shook as hy-vel rounds hit him from two angles. He fell back into his trench. A hand flailed from the hole, like a small white flag; then it fell from sight. Kinbote's picture broke up.

Skystriker craft like long-eared bats screamed in from the eastern horizon, barely at treetop height. They released short, stub-winged cylinders that hissed as they fell and blurred the space around them; the men below barely had time to gag on the fuel vapors before the mist ignited in masses of yellow fire. Shock waves knocked trees over, roots and all, and pushed up the earth in a wave. Air rushed in to fill the vacuum, a whirlwind and a thunderclap.

"Nuclears?" someone said behind Kinbote. No screen had been necessary to see the explosions. "The Covenants—"

"Fuel-air explosive," Kinbote said. "No radiation. Draeger's making certain we don't pull back to the city. Happy to oblige him."

The strikers pulled up and over, bat-shapes black against the moon.

"Son of a bitch!" screamed one of the beam gunners, and shoved his control grips over, swinging the gun toward the climbing strikers. "Son of a bitch! Son of a bitch!" Violet light stabbed the sky. Molten metal flew as a striker's wing was severed at the root. The craft tumbled, nearly colliding with another, then spun toward the port; it hit the wall of a hangar, crashed through, exploded within. Fire sheeted from the hangar door.

"Son of a *bitch*!" the gunner kept yelling, even as his support crew cheered. The gun came around again. The coils pulsed—and gun and truck and men disappeared in a burst of white light.

"Shut down the beamers and pull them out," Kinbote said, looking away from the glow on his display. "They've got counterbattery locked in." He looked up at bright Pallas. "Are there any clouds coming in? Something to get between us and all the satellites, ours and Draeger's?"

"Clouds before dawn, sir," said the communications officer. "Running six hours ahead of a rain front."

"The rain's early," Kinbote said. "That's the trouble with General Mud; he never heard of combined ops."

"Pardon me, Marshal?"

"Nothing, Corporal. Signal to all units: start the withdrawal in . . . twelve minutes. All messages by tightbeam or courier from now on; no broadcasts except for med-evac requests. And add . . . this must, emphasis, be an orderly withdrawal. Any soldier who flees,

or who leaves the path of movement, will be shot. Signed Kinbote."

"Yes, Marshal."

"And see if you can get anything more from the weathermen."

"By groundline from a distant earth station, Marshal?"

Kinbote smiled. That was why you had specialists. "Yes, Corporal."

"Yes, sir."

"Sergeant Steen!"

"Sir?"

"Withdrawal means us too. Get the CP rolling."

"Right, Marshal."

"Tea, Marshal?"

"One tea to go, Vane. Thank you." He took a sip. "What's in this?"

"Liquid protein, sir, just a little with the milk. It may be a while until breakfast."

"It may at that. Vane . . . I've got a message for Clair. Not official, and our channels are full anyway. Can you tap a ground line with that black box of yours?"

"I think so, sir."

"Good. Text reads . . . 'We're all fighting tonight.' Sign it Kinbote."

"Copies, sir?"

"Two copies, Vane. You know where."

"Yes, sir." He saluted and left. Kinbote was not sure, but he thought that, in the light of moon and fire, Ragan was smiling.

"Marshal Kinbote." It was the comm officer.

"Go ahead."

"Sir, about the weather platforms. Three's gone, sir."

"You mean seized?"

"Gone, sir—they blew it up. That is, our people did. They waited until the occupation force was aboard, then blew out all locks and airtight compartments, with enough charge left over to kill anyone still in a suit."

"I see. Is that all?"

"No, sir. They messaged us and the other platforms just before they did it. The enemy troops on the others . . . took them by force, sir. There are casualties."

"And is it over now?"

"No word for twenty minutes, now. I'm sorry this was delayed, sir."

Kinbote nodded, drank more tea. He looked in the direction of Argentine City, hoped no one there had similar ideas; the retaliation

there would not be confined to a few sealed decks. *Save us all*, he thought, *from the bravery of stupid men.*

Around Kinbote, the command-post team was boarding skimmers and fantrucks, equipment stowed or carefully in hand. He could hear the snap and rattle of small-arms fire. "Sir, we have contact," the comm officer said, hand on her portable's controls. A mortar burst rang dully.

The bravery of stupid men. The phrase would haunt him all through the long and violent night.

Dawn came red and savagely beautiful, burning clouds stretching across the sky from north to south horizon.

To Kinbote, it was in truth a beautiful morning, perhaps a miraculous morning. About two hours before, Draeger's pursuit had faltered. Kinbote's soldiers kept on moving. In trucks and on foot, on bicycles and tractors, on skimmers that bounced along on ground wheels because their fans would not bear the load, they had pulled on ahead, through the light woods and the long silver grass. Silent, singing, swearing, sweating in the cold pre-dawn air, threatening to drop and die on the spot—which a few did—they had increased their lead to a few kilometers. Draeger's artillery could still have reached them easily, but it fired only occasionally, without effect, and for the last half hour not at all.

Kinbote did not believe in the supernatural, but he could take a miracle when it was given him. And he knew better than to push one too far. He called a halt just at full light, laagering his rear with skimmer-mounted pickets and his three remaining beam trucks, unmanned and rigged for remote control.

"Breakfast, sir? The men are eating now."

"Thanks, Vane." Kinbote took a bite of bacon-and-egg sandwich. "You see, it wasn't so long until breakfast."

"Begging the Marshal's pardon, sir, it was the longest wait for a meal I ever had in my life."

Kinbote laughed. "There was a—what happened *there*?" Ragan's left forearm was heavily bandaged.

"Stray bullet, sir. Bone bruise, nothing serious, the medic said." He paused. "I was careful, sir. Orders."

"What?"

"I'd been meaning to tell you, sir. There was a response to your message last night."

"The . . . oh. What was the response?"

"'Be careful!' The Medical Officer has her copy already, sir."

Kinbote sat on the grass, his back against a tree, and ate his breakfast. It would be good having somebody else in the family who could cook, he thought; he and Beth had never figured it out.

His appetite suddenly went away; he swallowed the rest of the sandwich without tasting it and took a walk around the camp.

He had also wanted another doctor in the family.

Three mechanics were trying to turn two damaged gun carriers into one serviceable one. A chaplain with gauze across his eyes was conducting a small service; he held a prayerbook . . . upside down, Kinbote saw. He walked on.

Men and women slept on anything that would bear their weight, horizontal or not. Medics bandaged wounds, limbs, bleeding feet.

The burial detail was busy.

Kinbote leaned against a tree on the edge of the camp, looking in the direction of Draeger. *Are you tired, Colonel?* he thought across the distance. *You must be. How much more tired than I you must be. We must rest when this is over, you and I; have a drink before my fire.*

And I'll give you the sword I owe you.

He turned and saw something fluttering on the ground. At first he thought it was a pile of bloody bandages, and he shook his head slowly.

Then he saw what they really were: militia armbands, torn from sleeves and ditched beneath a tree.

He stood there, looking at them, and at length realized that something else lay with them: the uniform jackets of at least two regulars.

He went to find a shovel and help the burial squad, manual work to clear his mind, to tire him enough to sleep.

Kinbote awoke with his ears roaring and his vision blurred; he put out a hand and touched plastic, and realized it was raining. Someone, Vane most likely, had snapped a popcup shelter over him. He sealed his cuffs tight, checked the latches of his battlerig and unrolled his raincape; he got out of the shelter and folded it.

Around him, the camp was breaking, loading for travel. "Major Harrison?" Kinbote said.

The Major saluted. "Sir. Did you sleep well?"

"Well enough. All going smoothly?"

"You said the Owl by 1900 hours, sir. We'll make it."

"I'm sure you will. What's the situation?"

Harrison looked thoughtful. "Marshal, they haven't moved a step toward us. They threw some shells when the rain started a couple

of hours ago, but they were way the hell—pardon, sir, very inaccurate. That's why we didn't wake you, sir."

"Quite all right that you didn't, Major." *But the shells should have.*

Ragan drove up, the car's fans throwing up a few wet leaves, the canopy wipers working furiously. Kinbote got in, sealed the canopy.

They drove through the rain and the falling leaves, among the vehicles and the caped, marching troops. It was a typical first autumn rain: not pounding as the storms to come would be, but steady and cold.

Kinbote digested his reports. There had been about eighteen hundred Territorials receiving the attack; the First Regiment, twelve hundred militia, the rest armed civilians from the city who had put on armbands and taken places in the lines.

Two hundred were dead. Another four hundred had been captured, then paroled back into the city, which was not resisting. Another hundred and fifty had been lost in the retreat . . . one way or another. Twenty had been shot for fleeing.

And still Draeger did not pursue them. Kinbote had outriders to all sides; at any time he expected to hear that armor was falling upon his flank, even his front. But the country was empty.

Kinbote had no sound report of enemy losses—his own would be uncertain enough—but knew that they must be light. *Only a few little cuts*, he thought.

"Stop the car, Vane," he said abruptly.

Kinbote got out, looked back through the mist. *But the right little cuts will stop the fight. A surgeon's small cuts will kill.*

Forgive me, Alexis, for having no faith.

A skimmer pulled up. The comm officer leaned from the canopy. "Tightbeam from the Owl River, Marshal."

Then Draeger did circle us, Kinbote thought, *there are no miracles—* "And?"

"The engineers are ready to start bridging on your order, sir."

"Tell them to go ahead," Kinbote said firmly. "Anything else?"

"Sir, Thyssen's Station predicts the rain to end at the river line shortly after midnight."

"Call them back. Find out how fast the stormfront's moving and when the rain will lift from the last enemy position."

"Yes, sir."

Kinbote shook water from his head and shoulders, got back in the car.

"Anything wrong, Marshal?"

"Nothing we can help, Vane." Kinbote stared through the rain-

streaked canopy, his mind in another country, one whose terrain he did not know. "Nothing anyone can help, now, I think." He looked at Ragan, who sat straight, his glasses almost hiding the worry folds around his eyes. "But we're not done trying. Get us to the river."

When they reached the Owl, three hours before midnight just as Kinbote had asked of Harrison, the fourth and last of the folding-truss bridges was being jacked into place. The engineers were civilians, not army or militia; if Draeger had found them first, they were simply a private firm putting up bridges on the rising river, as they did every autumn. And that was the truth.

Not, Kinbote thought, that that had saved Weather Platform Three.

They would cross the river, fold back all the bridges but one, and dig in to wait for Draeger. When he came, the push of a button would blow the last bridge up—with a few Greys on it, were they to be so improbably foolish—and the Territorial forces would do what damage they could as Draeger crossed the Owl.

After that it would be over, of course. There had been no doubt that Draeger, with armor, artillery, and tac-air, would have made the crossing.

There had been no doubt, just hours ago.

The troops were settling in, under poppups and canopied trenches, inside vehicles and portable shelters. They were cooking dinners, reading, gambling, standing watch. Their weapons—regular battle-rifles and militia miscellany—were out of the wet, within reach.

They were still not an army—so small a fire did not harden an edge so quickly—but what they had been asked to give, they had given. Looking over the camp, Kinbote thought that he was as proud to have led them as he had ever been of any command . . . perhaps even his Rangers.

The Ramalea Militia had cost him the Rangers.

All handpicked politicians

Are the Ramalea Brigade,

went the barracks song Sergeant Cope sang when the Rangers' employers could not hear.

Each gains the power of the storm

When first he hears a gun—

Like thunder do their bowels roll . . .

Like lightning . . . do . . . they . . . run.

It should have been a sacred hymn on Ramalea, Kinbote thought; Sergeant Cope and so many more Rangers had died for its truth.

Kinbote went inside his shelter. It was plastic-paneled within, with an outer canvas wall to absorb the sound of rain. A small fan unit warmed and dried the air. The cot was neatly made, Kinbote's battle display up and running on a chest next to it.

He sat on the edge of the cot. The display still showed Draeger where he had stopped before dawn; but it showed only what his intelligence teams believed.

A book lay next to the screen.

Ragan came in, carrying a tray. "Tea, Marshal?" His voice was hoarse.

"Yes, Vane, thank you." Kinbote picked up the book. "You'd better see the medic for some biohist." He turned the book over.

Red eyes and bloody fangs.

LEGENDS OF THE WEREWOLF.

Kinbote turned sharply. "Vane—"

Standing there, in Territorial uniform and battlerig, was Dr. Alexis Teal. He held out a teacup. "I told you I'd visit, Ross." Teal's voice; faintly hoarse.

"Where's Vane?" Kinbote had a staggering thought. "You couldn't have—"

"Pretended to be your adjutant all the way from Port White? Maybe I could have. Killed Ragan? Easily. But I haven't done either. Vane's coming. I'll be gone before he gets here. I've got to get back to Draeger's camp." He reached for the light control, turned it half-way down. "That's better. You can turn it back up to read when I'm gone. I do want you to read that."

"How long have you been . . . inside Draeger's lines?"

"From about the time I blew up Weather Platform Three. Here, take your tea. These thin cups get cold fast."

Kinbote took the cup. "You . . . did that."

"I didn't throw the switches personally, of course. I was on the ground at the time. But I'd been up there, on what they thought was a maintenance run, and I put the idea into their heads. Of course they knew just how to do it."

"They were noncombatants," Kinbote said.

"So was Jael with her hammer and nails. They were also the only platform properly located to receive and filter from Draeger's scannersat. Therefore his best satellite data team would be there. It was, to use the term once tonight, a nexus of effectiveness. Identified. Eliminated."

He stretched his long fingers. Knuckles cracked like distant gunfire. "Then I killed his Battle Communications Officer. Needle in

the base of the brain, you know that trick. Moved him to one side long enough to revise a couple of orders, then propped him up outside the door of his bunker and shot the head off his shoulders from an unsuspecting range. Certainly a careless act to stick one's head out, considering what was going on outside."

Kinbote said, "What orders did you change?"

"The airstrike. Draeger knew perfectly well that you weren't going to run for the city. He had those FAE bombs targeted right across your line of march . . . and this was probably just blind luck, but they were close enough to your CP to have nicely toasted you.

"After that, I got over to the command center and got under cover. There wasn't anything more to do until you started to pull out and Draeger secured the port."

"You just hid?"

"I didn't stop watching the action, but yes, I hid." He faced Kinbote. His eyes were black glass. "During battles people get killed by accident, which I find useful, but it's not supposed to happen to me. Sure, I could have broken the necks of some combat effectives, but they weren't key targets."

"What about the men on the platform?"

Teal smiled, showing teeth. "The crew up there couldn't win a firefight and I couldn't be up there to do it myself. Would you rather have had the scannersat talking artillery on you continuously? Or didn't you miss the artillery?" He shook his head. "That artillery system—he was too dependent on it. Complex weapons can be dangerous to both sides. Much better to use . . . fangs, and claws." He arched his fingers, laughed, hissing.

"I missed the artillery," Kinbote said. "And the tanks."

"Draeger's still missing them. Badly. Who fixes your skimmer when it's ailing, Ross?"

"Perry Lincoln," Kinbote said. "And nobody else."

"I think you understand. While I was, ah, hiding, I listened to which mechanic's name got dropped the most. Their Perry Lincoln the Motor Magician."

This at least Kinbote did understand. This was how Teal had made his operation sound in the beginning: One person, cleanly.

"He was working," Teal said, "on a vehicle's lift system. The blades rotate at twenty-six thousand RPM, according to his scan-tach." He fanned his fingers and interlaced them. "The service bay had many useful safety features, some of which the fellow had disabled for convenience. The blades are slender, very tough. Not sharp, though."

The cup creaked in Kinbote's grip.

"So when the tanks had their inevitable small post-landing aches and pains, the ace mechanic was . . . *spread too thin*." Teal laughed, rasping and cackling.

The cup split. Tea splattered on the floor. "Alexis, why are you—"

"Of course you don't like cruelty, Ross," Teal said, still grinning. "You're like Draeger in that. Draeger hates cruelty, and as we all know, what you hate you fear. Doctors have that fear too, did you know, Ross?" He looked at his fingertips. "I think it's part of the desire to heal . . . the fear that if you do not heal, you'll kill instead. Or worse than killing: maim. Why is there such a vast popular literature of torture but only technical works on pain? . . . But surely you understand this. After all, what subcommand would it grieve you most to lose?"

"You killed his Medical Officer." Kinbote's mouth was papery dry, and he swallowed some liquid from the burst cup.

"Not most effective during the operation. I killed his chief nurse. But you know, I was thinking—"

If you say it I will kill you, Kinbote thought impotently.

"—of Clair the whole time. Of her eyes and her hands and her . . . well, of everything Clair is to me."

"What are you?"

"I told you at the start. A werewolf. Like the book says. A supernatural monster who for a few hours of daylight appears as a human being."

He sighed. "I see you still don't believe me. Are your nightmares really all about skimmer accidents and bankruptcy? Ask Clair—ask Elise. Ask them about episodic brain syndromes. About mild little men who pick flowers gently and eat no meat, until that switch snaps over inside their heads, and they put a bar full of cargojacks and policemen on the pavement bleeding. What, did you think my training came out of *books*?"

"I did not know it would be like this," Kinbote said levelly. He stood up from the cot, blood loud in his ears.

"You knew, but you didn't believe," Teal said, and Kinbote suddenly realized the man was not raging but pleading. "You never really believed. Then finally you ran out of faith in yourself, just for a moment. And in that moment you didn't need to have faith in me. You just let me go."

Kinbote looked at the pistol holstered in his battlerig.

"I'd take your hand off at the wrist," Teal said, without emotion but with utter seriousness. "And then stop the bleeding and dress it, isn't that the damndest thing? I'm not out of targets yet, Ross,

but you're not one of them."

"Draeger?"

"That's not necessary. I *really don't* kill unnecessarily. Do you know why their tac-air didn't fly any more? The chief nurse had the checkdown keys for their special support systems, but when she died, they got lost. I was going to tell you that, but you thought I was going to say something else . . . something it would have chilled you to hear."

Slowly, Kinbote clasped his hands behind his back.

"You see," said Teal, "you are like Solomon Draeger. You have a genius for war, and you've learned to live with its horrors. But there are higher orders of horror . . . that do worse than kill.

"Death's only the end, Ross. We both know that. Fear is the destroyer."

Teal took a few steps toward the door. "I'm sorry that my skill is so limited, Ross. I couldn't give you what you wanted; only what you had to have."

"You're wrong," Kinbote said. "I got what I wanted."

"You . . . oh. Of course. I'm sorry, Ross. I truly am sorry." He turned away. His voice came from far away, from that country Kinbote had found himself lost in: "What was it that General Sherman said . . . not 'war is hell,' that's the popular version. . . ."

"'War is cruelty,'" Kinbote said, "'and you cannot refine it.'"

"Yes," said Teal, and turned up the lights; when Kinbote's eyes adjusted, he was alone in the shelter.

Vane Ragan found him sitting on the cot reading, a puddle of tea drying on the floor.

It had taken Kinbote a while to remember the page number inscribed in Clair's book, but finally he had; and when he found page 127 he knew it was the right one. It began:

THE WOLF AND HIS BEST PAL

(or, *This Hurts Me More Than It Does You*)

As with all the monsters of legend, the death and destruction of the werewolf requires some special effort. Putting aside silver bullets (a prop of the tapeshow), we find that the secret ingredient is . . . love. Or at least something close to it.

Whenever the end comes, however it comes (and as we have pointed out, it always does), it must involve someone who was emotionally involved with the werewolf's human persona, whether or not s/he knows the beast is actually dear old Larry on a howl. Very often it is this person who actually kills the werewolf, and then watches, with

deep sorrow or deep shock as appropriate, as the fangs retract and the hair does whatever it is the hair does.

One would think from this that all a werewolf need do to insure long-term survival would be to cultivate an adequately antisocial human side. But none of them ever does.

On the other paw, why would somebody like that ever need to turn into a werewolf?

"Sir," Ragan said, "we've had a report of enemy moving this way. No fires yet."

"They'll be here at dawn," Kinbote said. "Tell the unit leaders."

"Yes, sir." He looked at the tea tray. "Anything else, sir?"

"Two messages," Kinbote said, closing the book. "Off the official channels. One to Clair. The other . . . to Colonel Draeger."

The clear light of dawn dazzled Kinbote's troops; they snapped visors into place, pulled canopies forward over their trenches and breastworks on the Owl's bank. Just before them was the river, shadowed by its steep banks, gray and turbulent. In the distance, transilluminated, were long flat clouds, forerunners of a rain front.

The light also caught the dull gray metal of Draeger's vehicles, emerging from woods into a silver meadow.

Kinbote stood in the center of his redoubt, not far from the one remaining bridge, absolutely still in his dress tans and battlerig. He would not need a screen to observe this day's action. A little behind him, Vane Ragan held a battle rifle at port arms. All around them, belts were loaded, rigs were cinched, bolts were drawn. The beam generators hummed low. There was a smell of meadow grass and gunmetal.

Draeger was eleven hundred meters away.

There had been no response to either of Kinbote's messages. Clair had been in surgery; if she answered the call, someone would die. He had left what message he could make understood to the attendant. The other message could not, by its nature, be replied to in words.

Only in actions, now.

Kinbote could see what was wrong before he raised his field glasses. It was no lightning armored thrust approaching, despite the clear weather and the good ground. The vehicles were moving at no more than walking speed. The infantry *were* walking, not mounted on the IFVs. Lift tanks crawled along on ground wheels; mobile artillery rumbled along with the rest, not seeking positions.

And still, Kinbote knew, if all those guns spoke, his forces would not be heard in reply.

A skimmer emerged from the line of the Greys, glided ahead of it. Kinbote raised his glasses: the car carried two uniformed figures and two flags. One gray, one white.

"Corporal."

"Marshal?"

"Signal to all unit commanders: The order to hold fire stands until countermanded. You will enforce this order by whatever means are necessary. Sign it Kinbote."

"Yes, Marshal."

"Vane."

"Sir?"

"Get the car."

Ragan moved. Across the field, the Silverburn grass, the vehicles came on, the gray skimmer drawing rapidly ahead.

Ragan drove up, folded the canopy fully open. "Flags, sir?" He indicated the Territorial and Marshal's banners on the fenders. There was a roll of white linen tight in his grip.

"Those are fine, Vane." Kinbote got in.

"Marshal," said the communications officer, "Major Gruning desires contingency orders in case of—"

"Remind the Major that if I am killed, Major Harrison is in command. Forward, Vane. Cruise."

They moved slowly among the silent troop positions, then nosed up over a belt of desensitized mines and were on the bridge. The sound of the river below was like blood rushing in the ears. In another moment the skimmer was on the opposite bank, out between all the guns.

A hundred meters out, Kinbote used his glasses again. He felt his stomach tighten.

The passenger in the other skimmer, whoever she was, was not Colonel Solomon Draeger.

Not Ramalea again, Kinbote thought, *I will not allow it*—Ragan glanced at him, but of course said nothing.

When the skimmers met, the lines were some four hundred meters apart. The officer in gray, who wore a major's insignia, spoke into a headset pickup, and Draeger's line creaked and rumbled to a halt.

"Marshal Kinbote?" the officer said, rising. "I am Major Juliana Davenant. I offer you Colonel Draeger's greetings and respects."

It was legal. Of course. It was within the Covenants.

"I offer the Colonel the same," Kinbote said, "and am prepared to

receive his surrender." He could hear Ragan's breathing, see his knuckles whiten on the control rod.

Davenant nodded. "We ask no terms beyond the usual, except to urgently request medical aid."

"Of course, Major."

"Our luck was bad," Davenant said. "I have never seen such bad battle luck. My Colonel tells me that soldiers must make their own luck . . . still, I think it might have been different."

"I agree with your commander," Kinbote said, "and also with you."

Davenant smiled and got out of her vehicle. "You are honorable and courteous, Marshal." She took the gray battle flag from the car's fender, rolled it, and presented it to Kinbote, across her elbow as if it were a sword.

"As are you, Major." Kinbote put the flag in his battlerig, over his left breast, though the doctors in his family told him that the heart lay elsewhere. He shook the offered hand. "Your surrender is accepted." He felt a momentary tightness in Davenant's grip; then the major let go, saluted, held still, as if waiting for something more.

After all this, Kinbote thought, I must try. "Major Davenant?"

"Marshal?"

"Please convey to your colonel my invitation to meet with him at the earliest opportunity. We have a great deal to discuss."

Davenant suddenly smiled broadly, relaxing without in the least slackening her pose. "He will be very pleased to hear that, Marshal. It had worried him from the first that . . . well. A moment." She spoke into the audio pickup.

A skimmer appeared at the end of the gray line. It flew two flags, one white, one gray with a golden blazon. A man stood in its front, beside the driver.

The car moved slowly along the line of vehicles; as it passed, gun barrels were elevated to point at the morning sky. When the skimmer reached the other end of the line it turned, its fans singing; and Colonel Draeger came forward.

Major Davenant was saying, "May I say, Marshal, that, seeing your world so beautiful this morning, I believe I understand what motivated you to . . ." Kinbote was no longer conscious of her, only the man in the approaching skimmer.

He was physically rather small, Kinbote saw; perhaps that was why he had chosen vehicular cavalry. His hair was white in the sunlight, blowing in the wind like the grass that surrounded them. One hand on the edge of the skimmer's windshield, he raised the other in a salute. Kinbote raised his own in reply. He could almost

see Draeger's face.

The colonel lurched, crumpled. There were three sharp snaps, from Kinbote's line. Sniper bullets travel faster than sound.

The command skimmer swerved. Ragan spun the fans high and raced for the spot, Davenant's car a hairsbreadth behind.

As they drew close, there was a throbbing sound in midair, and a wind from above that flattened the grass; a copter, the starburst and staff on its flank, was coming down. The doors were open before it landed, and the instant the skids touched down two medics were riding a cart out; a third figure in greens dashing from the cabin to join them: Clair.

Kinbote and Davenant stopped alongside each other, a little distance from Draeger's car. Davenant turned, and her look was searing—but she met Kinbote's eyes, read them, and all expression melted from her face.

"Your pardon, Marshal," she said, "I must take command of my troops."

"Of course, Major," Kinbote said automatically, wondering if the metallic sound he heard was copter rotors or gun mountings.

Another noise made him look down. Vane Ragan was pounding his injured arm and fist on the skimmer's fender with a slow, measured rhythm. His lips were drawn back from his clenched teeth. Kinbote wanted to tell him to stop, tell him to take Beth and run, where Star Kings and lesser kings and marshals and colonels were all unknown, to flee the curse of the werewolf.

He looked at Clair, wondering if she knew that he had called her to come and save the wrong man.

But Teal had told the truth: it was unnecessary. More: it was worthless.

Then he looked at Davenant's skimmer, at its driver, who had black, black hair and long fingers arched on the controls, and Kinbote wondered how he could have failed to see the truth from such close range.

Adam Herstatt, in white suit and raincape trimmed with crimson, came into the hospital emergency room. It was empty except for Kinbote. The door to the Red Unit was closed, its window lit dimly from within.

"Colonel Draeger is dead, Coordinator," Kinbote said.

"That's what your message said," said Herstatt, "and that you had his . . . murderer? Murder, Ross? In the middle of a war?"

"Hostilities had been formally concluded," Kinbote said flatly.

"As to a state of war . . . did you ever receive the declaration of war from the Exathenans, Coordinator?"

Herstatt's look was blank. "No, Ross, I don't believe I ever did. Is that against one of those Military Covenants or something?"

"Declarations of war are a political matter. Many undeclared wars have been fought. It's the troops in the field that decide the battle."

"Yes, well," Herstatt said, the trace of a smile forming. "You never were very good at politics, were you, Ross?"

"No, I'm not," Kinbote said. "I don't have any idea what the Exans are like, how their system works, what they really want from anyone, including us. So I listened to you, as the whole Council has for years . . . the whole Territory." He fought to keep his voice level. "There isn't any declaration because there isn't any war, correct, Coordinator? Somewhere there are Exan names on a contract, but you can buy names, can't you, Coordinator Herstatt? Just as you can hire assassins. But it must have really cost you to hire Colonel Draeger—"

"Draeger came cheapest of all," Herstatt said. "All he wanted was some land to retire on."

Kinbote could not speak for a moment. "He could have *had* that!"

"Of course he could have. Don't you think I would have preferred it that way? Wouldn't I rather have had both of you available for hire, instead of just one?" He looked thoughtful, almost sad. "But I needed the power first: the military under my direct control. And for the Council to give it to me, I needed the war."

"I confess I didn't realize how much it would take to make absolutely sure you'd fight. All those questions of honor and courage, not to mention Rama-whatever-it-was. But you finally came around. As did he . . . once I'd told him some things that positively shocked him."

He thought I wouldn't meet him. Davenant wondered about my motivations. "What did you tell him I was?"

"Caesar, of course," Herstatt said lightly. "All you soldiers know is Julius Caesar. It was wonderful of you to come up with a Rubicon."

In sudden agony, Kinbote turned to the closed Red Unit door. "Then he died—thinking—"

"Oh, come now, Marshal. I can accept the value of honor in motivating the living, but the dead don't think at all."

Kinbote whirled on him. "You're a damned traitor."

"I am a ruler," Herstatt said, trying to draw himself up to look down upon Kinbote. Despite his greater height and Kinbote's hunched shoulders, Herstatt was straining. "I am the supreme au-

thority on this planet, as I remember you saying. And now, I am supreme commander of the finest mercenary force, with the finest leader, on any planet—tried and proven in battle. Worlds will pay for us, Ross. Worlds will fall to us. Thus grow kingdoms.”

Kinbote was conscious of the pistol in his battlerig, hung under his arm near Draeger’s gray flag. There was a knife in the webbing. His bare hands would also suffice.

But he could not, and Herstatt had, without knowing, told him why: He was no Caesar . . . nor was he a Marcus Brutus, no matter how noble a Roman.

“You’ll have to turn the, ah, *murderer* over to me, of course. Civil authority, as you said. If you want to take a little of that frustration out on him first, I don’t think anyone will fault you. Just as you don’t need to worry about those charges of exceeding authority . . . after all, you did obey the direct order. You did win. Eventually you’re going to have to tell me how.”

Herstatt looked at the red-bordered door. “You know, Ross, you shouldn’t have told me Draeger was dead. You might have squeezed a few concessions out of me . . . and knowing you always tell the truth, I’d probably have granted them. A statement from Draeger, now, *that* would have been a threat. Both of you allied, and uneasy the head would have lain indeed. But anything a half-crazed sniper says can be denied without a flinch. . . . How much *did* the fool tell you, by the way?”

“Nothing,” Kinbote said. “I said we had him. I didn’t say we took him alive.”

Herstatt laughed aloud. “Oh, that’s good, Ross, very good. I see I’m going to have to demand positive statements from you, from now on.

“I think,” he said more quietly, “the right man died. . . . Yes. Draeger’s cadre, filled out and led by you.”

Kinbote said, “And directed by you.”

“This is how Jenghiz began,” Herstatt said. “I have a torch now, with a hotter flame than has ever been seen, to weld together an empire.” He fingered the colored hem of his cape. “Star Kings were all born mortal.”

The door chimed and swung wide. Herstatt turned around. Standing in the doorway was a tall man in gray uniform, a battle rifle in one hand. His look was black and stark and terrifying. He charged into the room.

“No!” Herstatt cried, as the man in gray grasped Herstatt’s jacket front in a long-fingered hand, picked the Coordinator completely off

the floor and hurled him like a rag doll against the wall. He raised his rifle and fired two long bursts.

The last shot was much louder than the rest, echoing differently. The soldier fell down, his rifle clunking on the floor, the front of his jacket bloody. His very black hair spilled over eyes that were lightless pits.

Clair stood in the Red Unit door, the dress pistol in her hand, dead level with her eye. There was no movement in the room, just the taste of smoke and the smell of spent cases.

Kinbote wondered, unable to move, if Clair had ever wanted the gun for any lesser purpose than this. *If. Please*, had been written in her book. The shot . . . the shot had been easy, he knew. It was the waiting that must have been very hard.

Finally he turned to where Herstatt lay and found him alive. Streaks of red were only the trim of Herstatt's disordered clothing. *Clair, you waited an instant too little*, Kinbote thought, and thought again of his gun, knife, hands. He looked up at the wall, saw two lines of bullet holes, absolutely vertical and drilled with precision.

No one, firing automatic at that range, could have failed to cut the target nearly in two. Certainly no one who could shoot like that. Unless. . .

Kinbote looked down on Herstatt. The Coordinator sat with his back pressed against the wall, hands spread on the floor, knees drawn up before his colorless face. His whole body trembled as if he had been drenched with icewater.

Then Kinbote understood. *Death is only the end. Fear is the destroyer.*

Herstatt got to his knees, then to his feet, still shaking, staring at the corpse the whole time. Clair tossed a green drape over the supine body, the face with its open eyes.

Herstatt clutched Kinbote's sleeve. "Ross . . . are there any more of them . . . like *that*?"

Kinbote looked into Herstatt's eyes. The pupils were huge. Kinbote wondered how much might have been saved, if only he had discerned the true fear from the false.

"How many more? *Tell me the truth!*"

Kinbote said nothing.

Herstatt jerked away. With a burning look back, and words that might have been "formal charges," he staggered out the door.

Clair knelt by the draped body. She was not crying. Perhaps she would, later. Kinbote was certain now that he had lost that skill; but later, perhaps, he would acknowledge the werewolf, and the loneliness, and the pain.

Kinbote went to the window. The cloud mass had darkened the whole sky. It was beginning to rain; the second rain. This one would be hard.

Of course he would bury the sword with its owner. The sight of Clair's eyes, her hair like long meadow grass, would forever remind him of the price of warrior's rest.

Herstatt stood on the curb, waving for his skimmer. He reached inside the crumpled front of his coat and threw broken pieces of cigars on the ground. Finally he found one that had somehow survived that incredible grip.

Teal had surgeon's hands, Kinbote thought, *very clever hands*, as Herstatt fumbled the cigar alight, stuck it between his chattering teeth.

The end of the cigar, Kinbote realized, must have been almost pure high explosive. ●



LETTERS

Dear Mr. Asimov:

Your November editorial ("Watch Out!") presents this reader with a perplexing task. How may one respond to a leading light in literature who seems to be overreacting—without himself overreacting? You are quite within your rights when you editorialize on the intolerance and anti-rationalism of those who call themselves "Scientific Creationists." You're within your rights, but I suspect you are pretty well out of the ball park regarding your manner and approach. You phrase your point so stridently (perhaps "intolerantly"?) as to invite out-of-hand dismissal by your readership.

It could be that demands for equal time in the schools for Creationism and Evolutionism are, as you imply, a subterfuge for anti-rational dogmatists by which to "get a foot into the school door," so to speak. However, you give the dogmatists such a fine target of *scientific* intolerance that much of your argument stands discredited. Is this constructive? Is it rational? One does not unhorse a demagogue by means of his favorite weapons.

I've been knocking around the field of technology as a systems engineer (PhD, if that's worth anything) for a few years now. Some of the most tightly closed minds

I've met on these travels have resided in the skulls of so-called scientists. There is a tendency in our business to believe fervently that not only must the world be rational, but it must be rational according to *our* concept of scientific rationality. In view of our vastly incomplete knowledge of a large Universe, this notion is, of course, utter nonsense.

As a fellow named Velikovsky told us years ago, the scientific method does not insist that a theory be good or bad. The method and its real practitioners insist only that a theory explain the available experience and evidence in an internally consistent manner. It is precisely with regard to the evidence that supposedly dogmatic "Creationists" have most scientists over a barrel. The great mass of the geologic record neither supports the simplified 10,000-year-old Earth of the Creationists nor validates millions of years of so-called "gradual" evolution of species, as taught under the label of scientific truth by those who rely on Darwin. So far as evolution is concerned, those of us who have advocated Darwin's theory have been no less guilty of preaching a myth than our Creationist or religious brethren.

At heart, Mr. Asimov, your editorial fails simply because it ap-

pears to structure the world into neat categories of "us scientists against them religious nuts." The world isn't that simple. The effort to define the world in rigidly rationalistic terms is no less faulty than any other effort to confine thought within an unchallengeable dogma of faith. The creative inspiration of insight which lies at the base of most new science is, after all, the greatest of the mysteries on which you and I rely almost daily in the practice of our art.

Sincerely yours,

Richard A. Lawhern
Major, USAF

My friend, if I say $2 + 2 = 4$ and a creationist says $2 + 2 = 5$, I am not going to be "tolerant" and say "Oh, well, there's no evidence for either," and I'm not going to be "open-minded" and settle on $2 + 2 = 4\frac{1}{2}$. The fact is you are totally wrong when you say that "the great mass of the geologic record neither supports" one side or the other. The evidence in favor of the Earth being billions of years old is overwhelming, and the chance of its being wrong is negligible.

—Isaac Asimov

Dear IAsfm:

I have never before written to any publication, but the consistently high quality of your magazine compels me to write to you. I especially enjoy Dr. Asimov's editorials, for they are always lucid, informative, and, above all, interesting. Besides all this I hesitate to subscribe to any magazine, but there is something different and

special in your magazine which makes me never want to miss an issue. That something is the poetry of F. Gwynplaine MacIntyre.

Mr. MacIntyre writes with great skill and wit with an underlying current of pathos and irony. There is a depth and meaning to his poems, and I don't want to miss any of them. I hope that Mr. MacIntyre will contribute to your magazine for a long time to come. I also hope that he will soon publish a book of his poetry. Maybe he has already, but these things take a little longer to reach Ohio.

Sincerely,

M. Joan Owen
Lisbon, OH

My own private feeling is that if MacIntyre doesn't publish a book of his poetry, I will hit him. That would be safe, for I'm sure he wouldn't hit me back. We living legends have our privileges.

—Isaac Asimov

Dear Dr. Asimov,

In reference to your November editorial entitled, "Watch Out!": I'm glad to see that you are concerned for freedom in scientific investigation and creative expression, a concern that I certainly share. In particular, I appreciate your desire to preserve open-mindedness in research and teaching, and to avoid the institutionalization of any theory as dogma. However (you knew this was coming!), I must disagree with your perception of scientific creationism as a threat to same. I speak for most creationists (although unfortunately not all) when I say that I have no doubts about

the validity of science, nor do I want to reinstate the Inquisition or make evolutionary theory illegal.

No scientific creationist I have ever met or heard from has denied or even questioned the validity of scientific methods and principles; rather they have questioned the validity of the evolutionist application of same. You state that creationists want to destroy modern science; this is news to me. I rather thought that they wanted to improve it, add to it, correct it, in the sense that any scientist does, devising, comparing, and discarding or modifying hypotheses to fit the data. It's only fair for evolution to undergo that same critical testing that every other scientific idea must, and to be set aside if it does not pass the test.

You also see creationists attacking real science as heresy and conniving to unite all the power of church and state to squash all heretics. You first cite the Arkansas case wherein it was decided that creation could be taught alongside evolution as an origin theory in public schools. This has been popularly known as "Scopes II"; it might better have been called "Inverse Scopes," because the teacher in question was a creationist who was not allowed to air his views in the classroom. In fact, public and private schools, even parochial schools, are normally dominated by evolutionary thought. Creation is viewed as a myth for simple-minded people, and is typically not treated in the classroom. Of course, society reinforces rather than undermines this; Joni Mitchell sings, "We are billion-year-old carbon"

("Woodstock"), Time-Life offers full-color expositions of the ascent of Man, and talk shows, news magazines and, as you pointed out, most science fiction assume the truth of evolutionary theory in its various aspects, so that even if creationists did want to stamp out even evolution, let alone "real science" in general, they would have a hefty task ahead of them. As it happens, however, to ascribe to them such a desire is as unfair as to say that science fiction writers want to abolish Christianity by law.

I am certainly not in a position to defend to you the scientific value of creationism; however, I sincerely hope that you and your readers will not reject it out of hand as mythological simply because some of its findings corroborate the Bible or require the existence of a Creator. Instead, investigate, just as I did, both sides of the question to get the best case you can for both explanations. Certainly no scientist would deny anyone the opportunity or the right to do that!

Sincerely,

Gretchen Lady
Lawrence KS

The issue at stake in Arkansas is not whether creationism is right or wrong, or whether a teacher should express his agreement or disagreement with either one—but whether a law should define what should be considered scientific or not. Would you be willing to have a state law decree that anyone who mentions divine creation in church must also describe the evolutionary view?

—Isaac Asimov

Dear Isaac,

I have been reading your magazine for several years (after having exhausted the supply of just about everything else I could find with your name on it). As a high school math teacher, I take pleasure in passing along parts of the publication to the English Department Chairperson. She is not a science fiction fan, and even more drastic—she doesn't appreciate you! Not too long ago (Oct. '81) you published a poem by Jon P. Ogden—"I Ain't Too Dumb To Care." She not only enjoyed this but in turn passed it to a member of the Social Studies Department, Joseph P. Foley. He was inspired to write a reply. I enjoyed it as much as the original poem, so I asked Mr. Foley if he minded if I passed the response along to you. He almost reluctantly agreed, saying he hoped he wouldn't get associated with those "English Teacher" types. The poem "I Am Too Dumb To Care" is enclosed.

Sincerely,

Sheila Dolgowich
West Berne NY

I AM TOO DUMB TO CARE
by Jos. P. Foley

I guess, Jon,
It comes down to
This:
You can take your poem,
And publish;
But I
've lived too long in the real
world
To believe in "poetry"
Much.

My mind responds to your effort
Like a golden question

Mark.

The muse holds your words and
weeps.
But I've already tried a hundred
times
To comprehend your
Verse.

Everyone says I'm very wise.
Just the same, you have the voice
Of a smart aleck.
And if you're not, I still don't see
Why I should trust you instead of
Baum.
Depends, I suppose, on who
remembers
You in 50 years,
When they still are watching
Dorothy on T.V.

*For what it's worth, I've watched
Dorothy on TV about 20 times.
"We're off to see the Wizard—"*
—Isaac Asimov

Dear Dr. Asimov,

Tracing the history of silk in *The Theft of the Mulberry Tree* (26 October 1981), Mr. Avram Davidson follows an interesting thread of history.

He does, however, make an error when he says that because silk is organic, it is absorbed by the body. In fact, silk is not absorbed, and silk sutures are found still present at subsequent operations even many years later. This property is one of the reasons for particular uses of silk: for example, in joining portions of bowel.

Gut is absorbable, and the silk-gut suture Mr. Davidson mentioned does not exist, to my knowledge.

This is a small point but may be worth tying in.

David J. McKnight, M.D.
Toronto, Ontario.

Aha! And what have you to say to that, Avram?—Isaac Asimov

Oh my God what was I doing all those years as scrub nurse in U.S. Naval Hospital Corps surgery? —Isaac! Why didn't you catch this as it went by? Can it be that you are not (gasp, choke) a, a Real Doctor? —Avram Davidson



NEXT ISSUE

In the August 1982 issue of *Isaac Asimov's Science Fiction Magazine* we'll be continuing our policy of offering Big Name writers for your entertainment. One of these names will be Harry Harrison, who will be profiled in the issue. Another will be John Brunner, who has translated a wonderful story by the late Christine Renard, a talented French writer. Also in the issue will be fiction by Stanley Schmidt (a Big Name to Analog fans), Spider Robinson, and Robert F. Young. You can catch it at your newsstands on July 6, 1982.

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SF CONVENTIONAL CALENDAR

by Erwin S. Strauss

Now's the time to join this year's and next year's WorldCons to avoid rate increases. Make your plans now for social weekends with your favorite SF authors, editors, artists and fellow fans. For a longer, later list, an explanation of cons, and a sample of SF folksongs, send me an SASE (addressed, stamped envelope) at 9850 Fairfax Sq. #232, Fairfax, VA 22031. (703) 273-6111 is the hot line. If a machine answers, leave your area code and number. I'll call back on my nickel. Send an SASE when writing cons. When phoning, give your name and interest right off. I wear the Filthy Pierre badge at cons.

JUNE, 1982

- 18-20—**SF Con**, For info, write: 337 Harford Rd., Syracuse, NY 13208. Or phone: (315) 454-3020 (10 am to 10 pm only, not collect). Con will be held in Syracuse, NY (if city omitted, same as in address). Guests will include: J. O. Jeppson, MD, I*S*A*A*C A*S*I*M*O*V, Peg & Pat Kennedy
- 18-20—**ElectroCon**, Box 1052, Kearney, NE 68847. (308) 324-2449. W. A. ("Ice and Iron") Tucker, Ed Bryant, Mike Kennedy, S. Gray, Masquerade. The Central Nebraska returns for a 2nd year.
- 18-20—**BrandyCon**, c/o ESCQ, Box 62, Claymont, DE 19703. Somtow (Mailworld) Sucharitkul. Relaxation.
- 25-27—**AmberCon**, Box 947, Wichita, KS 67201. Roger (Amber) Zelazny, Howard ("Ugly Chickens") Waldrop, Leigh Kennedy, Daryl Murdoch, Richard Corben, Rob Chilson, Lee (Shree) Killough.
- 27-2—**July—JeruCon**, Organizing Secretariat, Box 394, Tel Aviv 61003, Israel. Jerusalem. Alfred ("Demolished Man") Bester, Harlan Ellison, H. ("Stainless Steel Rat") Harrison, R. Sheekley, N. Spinrad, E. J. ("Perry Rhodan") Ackerman, M. Greenberg.

JULY

- 2-4—**InConJunction**, Box 24403, Indianapolis, IN 46224. Kelly Freas, Richard & Wendy (Elfquest) Pini, Roger Reynolds, Arlen Keith Andrews Sr. Elfquest parody play, masquerade. Wet Kaffan Kartest.
- 2-4—**MystrlCon**, Box 1367, Salem, VA 24153. (703) 342-6064. S. (Inquestor) Sucharitkul, Sam Moskowitz.
- 2-5—**WesterCon**, Box 11644, Phoenix, AZ 85061. (602) 249-2616. Gordon (Darsai) Dickson, D. ("Man Who Folded Himself"), Gerrold, Fran Skene. The big Western regional con at the 1978 WorldCon site.
- 16-18—**UniCon**, Box 263, College Park, MD 20740. Silver Spring, MD (Near Washington, DC) Hal ("Mission of Gravity") Clement Shubbs, Karl Koford, R. A. Madle, George (Amra, Owlswick Press) Scithers. Not connected with UniCons in Kansas or overseas. First one since 1979.
- 16-18—**Con*Stellation**, c/o Kennedy, 7907 Charlotte Dr., Huntsville, AL 35802. Phyllis ("Born to Exile") Eisenstein, A. J. ("My Lord Barbarian") Offutt. No connection to the 1983 WorldCon.
- 16-18—**OKon**, Box 4229, Tulsa, OK 79104. W. A. (Bob) ("Year of the Quiet Sun") Tucker, Fred ("Cool War") Pohl, Lee ("Voice Out of Rama") Killough, artist Kelly and Polly Freas. Masquerade.
- 23-25—**Archon**, Box 15852, Overland, MO 62114. St. Louis, MO S ("Cuja") King, Tanith Lee, Vic Milan.

SEPTEMBER, 1982

- 2-6—**ChiCon IV**, Box A3120, Chicago, IL 60690. A Bertram (Rim Worlds) Chandler, Kelly Freas, Lee Hoffman. The 1982 World SF Con. Join before July 15 for \$50, when rates go up again.

SEPTEMBER, 1983

- 1-5—**ConStellation**, Box 1046, Baltimore, MD 21203. John (Zanzibar) Brunner, D. Kyle, Jack (Well of Souls) Chalker. The 1983 WorldCon. Join before July for \$20 and avoid the next \$10 rate hike.

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